

THE PERSON OF CHRIST FOR THE BODY OF CHRIST:
A MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

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by
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This project examines the state of Christology among adults in a local congregation. The hypothesis is that a church-wide intervention focused on the person of Christ that utilizes multiple intelligences can effectively teach the historic Christian faith such that adults in a congregation are more likely to apprehend key aspects of Jesus' identity. The project consisted of a carefully designed sermon series and concurrent small group study. Results were assessed through interviews and surveys from before and after the project components were implemented. Areas within Christology that this project explored included the incarnation, resurrection, and divinity of Christ.

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I am grateful first of all to God, for unexpectedly calling me into ministry, and for the honor of serving the church in the ministries of Word and Sacrament. I am grateful for the great cloud of faithful witnesses who have gone before us, who have contended for the truth in ages past. Their courage continues to inspire me.

Thank you to my patient and generous wife, Brittany, who supported this endeavor even when it meant her taking extra responsibilities while I was away or writing. Thank you to my daughter Cora, who was born in the middle of this program, who fills my life with joy beyond measure.

I am fortunate to serve an open and caring congregation, one that appreciates leadership development and values education. The people of Grace United Methodist Church continue to live up to their name, and it is a great joy to serve them.

To the faculty of United Theological Seminary, especially my mentors, Dr. Watson and Dr. Hunter, you are a gift to the church and to me. I never intended to do a Doctor of Ministry, but I could not say no to a chance to study with two teachers who have both faithful hearts and incredibly sharp minds. I am not only a better theologian, but a better disciple, because of you. And to others at United: faculty, staff, and especially my peers: thank you. United is truly a special place, and the challenge of this program has been matched only by the joy of our cohort.

DEDICATION

To Cora Grace McIntyre: You are to me a living embodiment of God's grace, and, other than loving you, serving Jesus is the greatest gift of my life. I hope that this work, as well as my ministry as a father, husband, and pastor, has made the good news of Jesus' incarnation, life, death, and resurrection a living reality for you.

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...doctrine and discipline may be walls; but they are the walls of a playground.

—G.K Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*

INTRODUCTION

At the center of the Christian faith is not a place, a set of documents, a list of regulations, a relic, or a collection of practices, but instead a person: Jesus Christ. Insofar as Jesus is the axis around which Christian life and witness turns, the knowledge and proclamation of Jesus is always of utmost concern to the people of God. Driven by that conviction, this project sought to inculcate the historic faith into the local church, specifically teachings related to the area of Christian doctrine known as Christology, focused largely on the Person of Christ. Because the health of the local church, and its individual members, is directly tied to the handing on of the “faith that was once and for all entrusted to the saints”¹, the teaching and preaching of Christology is of the highest importance to the well-being of the local church. The problem this project seeks to address is how a local church can effectively teach the Person of Christ (that is, his identity and relationship to the Godhead) within a particular ecclesial context, in which doctrinal concerns have been consistently marginalized (not unlike its denominational family, the United Methodist Church, as a whole).

The hypothesis for this project was that a focused intervention utilizing Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences through preaching, worship, and small group

¹ Jude 1:3, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Unless otherwise noted, all scripture references in this document are from the NRSV.

studies could positively affect a congregation's understanding of the identity of Jesus Christ as defined by the broad consensus of the Christian tradition.

This project consisted of a sermon series and concurrent small group study for adults in a local church congregation. For the duration of the project, both the Sunday morning worship and sermons focused on Christological themes related to the person of Christ, and these topics were reinforced in a small group curriculum for adults. Utilizing practices informed by Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, this project was designed to connect with the widest possible range of people, in order to have the most significant net effect. The project was assessed by means of surveys offered to all adults present and interviews conducted with randomly selected adults.

The first chapter describes the intersection of the ministry context and the personal narrative of the author. Both the church and the author were significantly shaped by people and institutions that did not emphasize doctrine, and thus the needs of the congregation and the aptitude of the researcher met in significant ways. Important to note is that this project took place during the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-2021, thus shifting all activities planned for this project to virtual experiences.

The second chapter explores 1 Corinthians 15 as a biblical cornerstone for the entire project. Outside of the gospels, this chapter from St. Paul contains perhaps the New Testament's most important statements about the resurrection of Jesus. As will be explored later, the church's chief convictions about Jesus are grounded in the reality of the resurrection. Thus Paul's argument to Corinth becomes a very relevant argument for the church today, and an important starting point for this project.

In chapter three, we turn to a historical exemplar of Christological formation in the work of Gregory Nazianzus. This chapter examines the argument in two of his *Theological Orations*, which are illuminating examples of Patristic preaching that are doctrinally oriented around questions of Christ's identity. Nazianzen brings to this project not only a precedent for Christologically robust preaching, but a refreshing directness in matters of truth and error in the teaching of the church.

Chapter four looks to a contemporary theologian who has also served as the leader of the world's largest Christian communion. Long before he was elected Pope, Benedict XVI (then Joseph Ratzinger) was regarded as one of the foremost systematic theologians in the world. This chapter explores Ratzinger's Christology, which provides a contemporary example of how ecclesial ministry might be shaped by robust doctrinal fidelity. Moreover, Benedict's humble desire to simply follow the Bible and the Fathers of the church, combined with his commitment to deeply engaging both modern scholarship and the modern world, provided a helpful model for the preaching and teaching of which this project was constituted.

The fifth chapter examines Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences for use in preaching and teaching in the life of the church. Gardner, a long-time Harvard psychologist, sought to complicate the regnant notions of intelligence that have driven education and psychology for decades. Arguing that intelligence goes beyond simply verbal and mathematical realms, his multiple intelligences theory has been influential in classrooms around the world. While St. Paul, St. Gregory, and Pope Benedict informed the content of this project, Gardner's groundbreaking work shaped its execution.

The sixth and final chapter describes and analyzes the project itself. As will be shown, this intervention likely did not result in significantly shifting the congregation towards classic Christological teaching. Thus, along with relevant charts and data, the chapter concludes by exploring possible reasons for this outcome, and describes where further research along these lines may be fruitful in the future.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is threefold. First, its aim is to describe how my ministry skills and interests connect to the needs of my context. Secondly, to describe how the interconnections between my journey and the needs of my ministry context serve as the basis for a Doctor of Ministry project. Finally, it will conclude by sharing the theme for and some broad premises on which I built this intervention.

Context

My ministry context is Grace United Methodist Church in Greensboro, North Carolina. Some particular aspects of Grace UMC that I sought to explore and address as part of my project involved catechesis, formation, and Christology. In her book *Almost Christian*, Kenda Creasy Dean identifies the tragic dearth of basic Christian teaching that is rampant in many congregations, and in particular mainline churches. She describes one aspect of "consequential faith" (her term for faith that sticks across generations) being the possession, celebration, and sharing of a specific God story; where Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is ascendant, part of the solution is thus teaching the "faith once delivered," which naturally centers upon the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

I believe that Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD) is present at Grace. The church grew under a low-expectation, seeker-sensitive approach common in late 20th century Protestant circles. Grace's leadership in the early 2000's oversaw a number of significant changes, most of which were positive. These changes attracted many young families, shifting the demographics of the church, in part because contemporary worship was also added. During this period, for instance, a nearby house was purchased and torn down to create more parking space on the east side of the property, and the fellowship hall was renovated. Many of the current active members at Grace came during this high water mark of the congregation's life; unfortunately, though, there was a significant exodus upon the departure of a particularly popular senior pastor, a change which was not desired or requested by either the church or the pastor. This, and subsequent appointment difficulties, eroded trust between the congregation and the larger United Methodist structure. Ironically, the church today has a degree of antagonism toward the main Methodist denomination not unlike the attitudes that led to the Methodist Protestants breaking away from The Methodist Church. My observation, as well as comments from a number of key leaders, lead me to believe that for over a decade Grace grew wide but not deep.

The result of these dynamics is that, half a generation on, many at Grace are poorly formed in the basics of Christian faith. One way this manifests is in a consumer mentality. For some, the church is less a community of disciples than it is a dispenser of religious goods and services. Likewise, I suspected before beginning this project that many in my church regard Jesus – or at least a particular vision of Jesus – as an extraordinary human teacher, a great ethical guru or spiritual master, but not necessarily,

in N.T. Wright's phrasing, "Israel's Messiah and the world's true Lord." To some, I suspect Jesus is simply part of a generic upper-middle class lifestyle, a very nice fellow, but not necessarily God in the flesh.

An example of this is that Grace invests its time and energy in a great deal of outreach and charitable activity, but with little theological content. This has, to be fair, been a gradual shift at Grace, concomitant with Methodism's shift from an evangelical movement to a mainline church. A look back at Grace's history illustrates this point. In 1899, the conference minutes include a report that a missionary, Annie Forrest, just returned from Japan to tour the other Methodist Protestant churches in the area and that it was hoped that "she may succeed in extending throughout the state the work already commenced by the women of Grace Church, Greensboro."

A few decades later, one finds Grace listed on the honor roll of churches which had paid an average of fifty cents per member towards the debt following the construction of a Children's Home (orphanage) in High Point, which at its peak housed sixty homeless youth. Grace members were very instrumental in founding that home. When the Methodist Protestants reunited to form The Methodist Church in 1939, there were already similar ministries in Winston-Salem and Raleigh, so it was decided to close the High Point home, whose property was given to what would become High Point College.

Glance forward several more decades, and a group of area pastors began meeting in the basement of Grace to form what would eventually be Greensboro Urban Ministries. Greensboro Urban Ministry (GUM for short) recently celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, and is the chief ecumenical relief agency in town, providing food, clothing,

shelter, and other assistance to Greensboro residents on the margins. Decades after that, Grace would for years host the offices for Habitat for Humanity, until it outgrew the space and went elsewhere. Both of these are, to varying degrees, Christian organizations that are not, in official or unofficial presentations, overtly "religious." It is easy to support kind deeds that are not explicitly religious in content, which I believe may have often shaped not only the outreach of the congregation but also its community. In short, I fear that Grace – like many Mainline congregations – experiences the form of religion without the power. This power, from a new Testament perspective, comes from the crucified and risen Lord.

Grace does a great deal of charitable ministry but often it is unrelated to the person and work of Jesus; the church has an innate sense that it should help people, though most would struggle to say why, outside of being a good person. There is little awareness of how concepts of justice, fairness, equality, or generosity might connect to classic Christian teaching about Jesus' own life and mission. Grace does many wonderful things to serve our community, but rarely connects it the kingdom of God that was the focus of Jesus' own ministry and teaching. (During the course of this project, Grace updated its mission and vision to reflect a more Christocentric identity, so there may be some new potentialities that did not exist at the outset of this project.)

For these reasons, I focused my project on Christology. My hope was to connect the work of the church to the person of Jesus; like many Mainline churches, Grace has largely lost a serious sense of Jesus as Lord, Savior, and Emmanuel. While some may find a particular vision of Jesus compelling – the Jesus who fed the hungry and forgave

sinner – it is often a Jesus tied more to personal life philosophy or partisan viewpoints than the Jesus one finds in Scripture.

This is reflected in the lack of serious Bible study at Grace. Other than our older residents in nursing homes (before COVID-19), there is little desire for serious biblical engagement. Classes often focus on topics – family, marriage, prayer, etc. – but rarely is the Bible studied for its own sake. Bad theology has been enforced from clergy and staff, at times. A former children's minister once said, in a children's sermon on Sunday morning, that Jesus was "not perfect, he was just like us." All of this, combined with the generally lax view of spiritual formation and Methodist identity that was regnant at Grace during much of its growth, pointed to some serious problems.

This is an unfortunate state of affairs for many reasons. Chief among them, as Dallas Willard points out in *The Divine Conspiracy*, is due to the compelling nature of Jesus himself.¹ We often forget to address Jesus as a joyful companion, a powerful King, or a humble servant, because the Jesus we have heard preached and made up in our heads is something of an impersonal force of sentimental niceties and nonspecific good feelings. The Jesus of Scripture and tradition is a far more fascinating figure, who, according to the Bible (and the pietist bent of my own tradition) longs to know us on a deeply personal basis. In short, I was concerned that my congregation has been missing out, and thus there was a void to be filled here.

I believe one answer to this problem is via education and catechesis. Grace has a long history of being involved in education. As mentioned above, Methodist Protestants

¹ Dallas Willard. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life in God*. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1998). See Chapter 8.

in North Carolina, with Grace in a leading role, donated the land for what became High Point College (now University – my alma mater). Additionally, High Point University received its financial genesis, in part, from a challenge gift of \$300,000 in stock by a member of Grace. The first president of the college was a former pastor of Grace. Like many other Methodist educational institutions, a place of higher learning founded by followers of Jesus now has largely a secular mission with little input (much less oversight) from the church which birthed it. Likewise, Grace has historically been situated near several large institutions of learning such as Greensboro College and University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Even today, we count a number of professors among our parishioners, and all of our families generally expect their children to go to college. An intervention that puts an emphasis on teaching and learning should be a good fit for Grace, because education is very much constitutive of Grace's ecclesial DNA. I also believe this was a sound approach for my gifts and interests, for reasons I will now share.

Ministry Journey

My formation in Christian faith has been chiefly through educational avenues, though in diverse settings. When we moved to North Carolina, my parents enrolled me at a school attached to a very large Southern Baptist church, Calvary Day School, in Winston-Salem. I attended Calvary from third grade through high school. Calvary was a classic Southern Baptist establishment. It remains one of the largest churches in the state convention, which was often hosted there. Calvary would have qualified as a megachurch even before that term became popular. The school, however, had a tenuous relationship

with the congregation. About half the students were from the church, and the rest of us were from various denominational backgrounds. Though it was a private school, not all of the students were from wealthy families. I had classmates whose parents were doctors and lawyers, but many of them were also middle-class families like my own that sacrificed a great deal to send their children to a Christian school. Though I take issue with many aspects of my formation at Calvary, I have always been appreciative of the choice that my parents made. They could have lived in a nicer home, had better vacations, and driven better cars if they had placed me in public school. They sacrificed so I could have a high quality education in a Christian environment.

During this period, we were not active in church; we did pray before meals, and we would always recite the Lord's Prayer on the way to school. We would attend services often at Christmas, and my dad usually had an Easter Sunrise Service in the cemeteries he ran during my formative years. I would help with these from a very early age; I recall getting up at four in the morning to go get donuts and put luminaries along the road, then I would hand out bulletins to those coming to the service. When I was a toddler we were active in a small UMC in eastern North Carolina. However, for most of my school years after we moved away from that congregation we attended various local UMC congregations occasionally, but never joined or became involved in one until I was a junior in high school.

At Calvary, we received an excellent education thanks to the small classes and dedicated teachers, but it came with a great deal of Baptist formation. Students attended chapel each week, which began with the pledge to the American flag, the Christian flag, and the Bible. We prayed before each class, and always had a required Bible class. These

were quite effective, especially for Bible memorization. When I went to church later, and then studied the Bible, I had an advantage over many of my peers because of this formation. Not all of the students or teachers were Baptist but the curriculum reflected Southern Baptist theology. We were taught creationism in Biology class; at one point, the infamous creationist Ken Hamm did a seminar for us. We studied charts comparing prophecies in Daniel and Revelation; I remember my high school principal telling us that we were “the last generation,” because the signs of the end times were surely upon us (my high school years were in the thick of the *Left Behind* phenomenon). We learned a great deal about the evils of alcohol, premarital sex, drugs, dancing, and gambling, but spent little time on other ethical questions like racism, war, and poverty. We did a curriculum early in high school called *Understanding the Times* that was essentially an anti-Marxist, Christian Cold War primer, albeit two decades too late.

The Jesus to whom I was introduced in this fundamentalist environment was a particularly low-church Protestant vision of Christ who was very concerned about personal sins and very uninterested in social sins and structural evils. He was a Jesus who was so personal that the communal and ecclesial aspects of discipleship were almost non-existent. While, thanks to a heavy dose of penal substitutionary atonement, we did encounter a crucified Jesus, we did not meet the Jesus who preached, taught, and revealed through story and miracle the way of the kingdom. We rarely travelled the distance from Good Friday to Easter. In short, the Jesus of my childhood was something less than the Jesus of the Bible and the tradition.

Part of my story also involves an occasional disconnect between knowledge about Jesus and living a holistic life as a disciple. My spiritual growth and my academic

journey have run parallel for most of my journey, but they also disconnected at times. When there has been a lack of alignment between my intellectual growth as a theologian and pastor and my spiritual growth as a follower of Jesus, my life has gotten off track. This is a part of my story that often informs how I care for parishioners who are going through their own struggles.

Because I was not raised in the church, many of my most formative spiritual experiences came through education. I went to college intending to be a history professor. I found a love for history in middle and high school, and – for some reason, I am not clear why – I had an early desire to teach it at the college level. My second year at High Point University, however, I took a required religion course, which amounted to a broad critical introduction to biblical studies. Not long into the course, we discussed the creation narratives in Genesis. This was, in many ways, exactly the situation for which a decade of Southern Baptist education had prepared me. I vividly recall raising my hand, full of righteous indignation, and asking the professor, “Why does God need evolution?” The professor responded, with more kindness than was warranted, “Perhaps God doesn’t need evolution, but we need evolution to understand how God works.” I was floored. My fury did not go away immediately, and the change was not instantaneous, but that class set me on a new course spiritually, academically, and vocationally.

After that religion class was over, I took another. More soon followed. Eventually, I became more interested in studying religion than history. My faith was maturing as I was growing as a student of religion; I was unlearning a great deal, but I was hungry and searching. I added religion as a second major, and decided I wanted to

pursue further studies in theology rather than history. On the advice of professors, I applied and was accepted to Duke Divinity School.

I went to Duke planning to go immediately on to doctoral studies, promising everyone I knew that God did not want me to be a pastor. At Duke, I experienced some struggles through which I matured, both personally and spiritually. In particular, seminary helped me to reassemble the erratic pieces of a faith that had in many ways been torn apart by an exposure to historical-critical study. While college cured me of fundamentalism, once those scales had been lifted from my eyes, it was not until seminary that I received a more complete, full-orbed vision of faith.

This melding of intellectual interest and faith formation has been both a blessing and a burden. It has been a blessing, in that I have had wonderful opportunities to study with great people, many of whom I still consider mentors and friends. This can also be a burden, because it means I have had a tendency to make faith into an intellectual pursuit rather than pursue a more holistic discipleship. In some ways this probably links to my fundamentalist training, which taught me that if I simply believed the right things, I would be saved (once, and for all time, of course). This overly cognitive approach to faith is something I continue to combat, while at the same time I am drawn to the intellectual life of seminars, books, and writing.

N.T. Wright is a significant figure to me, and in some ways I would like to model my ministry on his. He is at once a churchman and a scholar, having contributed meaningfully both as an academic and an ecclesiastical leader. He is read with benefit by both specialists and laypersons. I have been blessed to do some teaching for laity initiatives, and always find it to be life giving, and recently I have had the opportunity to

work as an adjunct professor at a local college. In the future, I could see myself serving as a campus chaplain, or in some other role that combined the academic and the pastoral.

I have gifts and skills in preaching, teaching, leading worship, and mentoring people in spiritual growth. These are gifts that, I believed, could be leveraged in a project whose goal is to connect orthodoxy to orthopraxy. Because I have been through my own "dark nights of the soul" in which these were not in balance in my life, I have relevant experience to help guide a congregation through the process of realigning these aspects of their ministry.

Several times in my vocational journey I have been close to burnout, due to not setting healthy boundaries and becoming lax in my spiritual disciplines. For instance, I could recite the sabbath commandment, but I never practiced sabbath. On another level, despite my articulate grasp of the *via salutis*, and the classic Wesleyan doctrine of grace, I have sometimes seemed addicted to trying to earn my worthiness, and even my salvation, by constant activity and achievement. I know what it means to lose sight of Jesus in the process of preaching about him. I know what it means to do the work of Christ without spending time with Christ, and I would like to offer those I lead a more fulsome vision of the Christian life.

Synergy

Knowing Jesus, both with head and heart, thus brings together the needs of my context and my personal ministry story. This is why I decided to focus on Christology and, in particular, the person of Christ. Early on, I had in mind the Lord/lunatic/liar "trilemma" that C.S. Lewis warned about. As mentioned above, Grace once had a

children's minister for a time who had a classically Arian Christology. I take this as indicative of a larger mood toward doctrine that was present under at least some of the previous leadership. Another example is a leader who once cited a Jesus Seminar book in helping to bring her back to faith – and it was specifically the work's take on Christology that was significant. This book was recommended to her by a former staff member at Grace.

In my view, a high Christology is characterized by a vision of the person and work of Christ that is in keeping with the Rule of the Faith and the canons and creeds of the undivided church. On a congregational level, at its most basic, I want baptized laity to be able to articulate the full divinity together with the full humanity of Christ, and have a rudimentary appreciation that the Jesus of Scripture is the second Person of the Trinity.

My personal interest in theology and doctrine, combined with a love of history, made this an excellent intersection of the needs of the congregation with my own talents. I am gifted in explaining complex biblical and theological ideas in ways that laity can comprehend and apply, and I believed I would enjoy the challenge of approaching “first things” with Grace. Such a project could be both personally fruitful and communally beneficial.

Christology is important to my ministry because if Jesus is not who the church has said Jesus is, we should all sleep in on Sunday mornings. As Paul makes clear (explored in depth in the next chapter), if Christ is not raised our faith is in vain. The Christocentric orientation of our message and ministry is the difference between a church led by the Holy Spirit and living out the gospel, and a social organization designed either for civic engagement or social mobility. Moreover, Christology shapes my philosophy of ministry

in that I seek to be a servant leader with a special affinity for those left out, rejected, and forgotten, and I intentionally try to incarnate God's love in all aspects of my ministry. Finally, I see my role, as Karl Barth famously observed, like that of John the Baptist as portrayed in the Eisenheim altarpiece, which hung over his desk: to point a finger toward Christ, not just by my words but by my life.

My project involved a short-term intervention combining a liturgical, homiletical, and educational focus on Christology. It drew on both Scripture and the riches of the church's other canonical treasures (e.g. hymns, saints, and creeds). I created surveys and interview questions to assess the effectiveness of the project on the congregation as a whole.

Given the importance of Christology to the church across time and space, there were a variety of possible starting points in terms of history, biblical studies, and doctrine from which to choose. For history, the first 400 years of the church, leading up to Nicaea and Chalcedon, needed to be explored. Additionally, I wanted to examine some of the great Christological errors of both the ancient and modern church. For instance, one could argue that Arianism never went away, it simply reemerged after the Enlightenment thanks to certain forms of higher biblical criticism.

Likewise, this topic lent itself to a variety of biblical starting places. John's prologue was a natural choice, and I thought early on I would want to look at the "Christ hymn" in Philippians 2. I considered touching on Irenaeus' Rule of Faith, and how it informed the selection of texts for the New Testament canon, as well as its content, but decided this was too much to fit in. 1 Corinthians 15 became a natural focal point early on, not only for the capstone sermon but for the initial biblical foundation.

Theological foundations for the project include several major areas of systematic theology, with a focus on the person of Christ. This breadth is due, of course, to the fact that the identity of Jesus cannot be wholly divorced from questions (at minimum) about atonement or the Trinity. Here, a variety of saints, doctors of the church, and theologians from across the history of the church can and should be consulted, in particular those responding to heretical Christologies that have crept up in different times and places. In the end, I chose two figures, one ancient and one modern: Gregory of Nazianzus for a historical foundation and Benedict XVI for a contemporary theological foundation.

Because this project is educational in approach, I selected an influential education theory to form the interdisciplinary foundation for this project. Howard Gardner's groundbreaking work on multiple intelligence theory has influenced a generation of educators, urging teachers around the world to develop a variety of different capacities in students. Insofar as this project hoped to influence not just intellectual knowledge about Jesus but a deeper, embodied walk with Jesus, it was a reasonable hope that preaching, teaching, and worship informed by Gardner's theory would help the largest possible number of people not only understand who Jesus is but more deeply experience his presence according to their particular aptitudes.

The change I hoped to see in the congregation after this project was a deeper desire to know Christ and experience transformation in Christ. I was also hopeful to see a stronger commitment toward the mission of the church and a greater ability to talk personally with and about Jesus. But beyond any other results, I simply wanted my congregation to have a joy-filled, full relationship with their Lord.

What I hoped to learn was how to present the ancient faith and make it compelling for the people I serve. As will be discussed later, though, Tim Keller makes a strong argument that at this moment in Western history, churches do not just have to share the good news, they have to combat toxic variants of it. Something like this, I believed, was the challenge at Grace as I embarked on this project. That is, not simply teaching Christology to pure nonbelievers, but re-educating people whose Christologies have been, to some extent, malformed. Rather than starting with a blank slate, this project had to meet people in a variety of places, ranging from close to agnostic to nearly Chalcedonian.

That said, I was excited to take up this challenge. My hope is that this project can serve as a model for similar interventions in other churches, particularly those in Mainline churches seeking renewal. My own story will serve this project well. Because I know how important formation is, and what it means to be malformed, I was able to empathize with those challenged by this process. Similarly, because I have been exposed to a variety of denominational and theological perspectives in my own journey, I was equipped to work alongside people from a wide range of personal Christologies through the course of this project.

Finally, this project needed to balance intellectual formation with spiritual formation. My own personal struggle to integrate these helped to inform this aspect of the project. My ultimate desire was not simply to help people repeat true statements about Jesus, but for people to encounter Jesus as savior and Lord, to come to love him more, and thus increase in holiness. This project was therefore designed to help people connect

the person of Christ to everyday faith as they actually live it, not as a bumper sticker or placeholder for a particular ideology, but as the Jesus of the Bible and of the church.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Paul's argument about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 is a critical resource not only within the Pauline corpus but for the whole of the Christian tradition. His vigorous, multifaceted defense of the resurrection is unparalleled in the New Testament and a crucial statement for historic Christianity. At issue is nothing less than the Easter proclamation itself: What happened after Jesus was crucified? If Jesus was resurrected, what does this mean for the baptized? Is the future for God's people a disembodied, ethereal state, or something more? These questions and more are addressed by Paul in the culminating moves of his first letter to the quarrelsome church at Corinth. Christians living in the 21st century West find themselves in no less complex an environment today, whether spiritually, politically, or intellectually. The same questions Paul's church was raising about Jesus and the future are questions that remain pertinent today. The answers, too, are just as foundational for Christian doctrine and for all of Christian life and ministry as they were when Paul first wrote to this conflicted community. To apprehend this argument for the contemporary church, it is necessary to grasp the history and culture of Corinth, to understand Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church, to examine the broad themes of the letter and chapter 15's place therein, and, finally, to look closely at the text itself and examine how Paul develops his argument.

Doing so will make clear the implications of this text for a ministry project geared toward equipping people with the life-changing narrative of Jesus, crucified and risen.

Paul in Context

We begin with a word about Paul. Paul lived and worked as a Diaspora Jew in Asia Minor. As such, he was influenced by a variety of contexts, including Jewish Palestinian, Hellenistic Greek, and Roman cultures. Each of these influences must thus be considered when interpreting Paul's writings. Particularly important for studying the Corinthian letters is the question of Paul's education. Ben Witherington notes the scholarly controversy over whether Paul was raised and educated in Rome or in Tarsus. In either case, Paul clearly had training in Pharisaic Judaism but also seems familiar with Greco-Roman rhetoric, a skill he deploys throughout this chapter and indeed the letter itself.¹ Paul even turns the tables on his opponents at Corinth and intentionally "lampoons Sophistic or ornamental rhetoric at crucial points," using their own tools against them.² At the time of writing 1 Corinthians, Paul is not a young man. He's been a Christian for about twenty years, and has been faithfully executing the strenuous work of an apostolic missionary for roughly a decade.³

Corinth was an important cultural and economic center during the Apostle's ministry. Located on the Isthmus of Corinth, it looked out over two ports, and thus had

¹ Scholars disagree over the source of Paul's rhetorical skill, which seems counter to 2 Cor. 11:6. See Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 2.

² Witherington, 46.

³ Witherington, 5.

influence over the major trade route between the Ionian and Aegean seas.⁴ A century and a half before Paul, Corinth had been destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C., and Cicero noted in his travels in the late 70s B.C. that the city remained in ruins for decades, with no one willing to rebuild.⁵ In Paul's time, it was inhabited mostly by descendants of settlers whose families dated from Julius Caesar's revival of Corinth as a colony in 50 B.C. Many of those initial settlers were retired soldiers. (Time-tested experience suggested that having a plethora of bored soldiers near the capital of the empire was unwise). Indeed, the very architecture of downtown Corinth in the first century was manipulated through a series of projects "to form a huge, composite, splendid monument to the imperial family." This was a stark reminder that the principalities and powers proclaimed their own soteriology and eschatology, and thus it is no surprise that the Apostle has to circle back to re-catechize some at Corinth on just these points.⁶

In Paul's time, Corinth was a prominent city, and was named the capital city of the region (not Athens, surprisingly⁷) as early as 2 B.C. Contemporaries lampooned it as a city with wealth which lacked culture, a sort of "new money" haven.⁸ Witherington describes Corinth as "a magnet for the socially ambitious," for instance.⁹ Yet culture – in the form of religious establishments, plays, and other endeavors – was quite prominent.

⁴ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 3.

⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 5-6.

⁶ Witherington, 297.

⁷ Witherington, 9.

⁸ J. Paul Sampley, "The First Letter to the Corinthians," *The Acts of the Apostles, Introduction to Epistolary Literature, the Letter to the Romans, the First Letter to the Corinthians: New Interpreter's Bible Vol. X* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 775.

⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 20.

Corinth was the site of the biannual Isthmian Games, second only in importance to the Olympic Games held every four years. Indeed it was a competitive city, the first Greek city to hold Roman-style gladiatorial combat.¹⁰ While Corinth was host to the full panoply of Roman deities, temples, and official cults, it is unlikely that mystery religions or Christian Gnosticism – whose presence was often speculated upon by previous generations of scholars – were prevalent, if at all present.¹¹

As a colony, life in Corinth was mirrored upon Rome, as reflected in its architecture, governance, and language. Pre-Roman Corinth had apparently earned a reputation as a city rife with sexual promiscuity. The famed playwright Aristophanes coined a verb, *korinthiazesthai*, that meant “to fornicate.”¹² This reputation may have been aided by the infamous temple of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility (reinforced by many temple prostitutes), a shrine to which many pilgrims traveled great distances for worship and entertainment.¹³ In Paul’s day, Corinth remained every bit the cultural and entertainment hub described by that epithet. Witherington, commenting upon its cultural amalgamation, argues that “Greco-Roman” is the term which most accurately names Corinthian culture during Paul’s ministry.¹⁴

Paul had travelled to Corinth years before writing this letter and established a strong relationship with the church. By this point, his missionary tactic “was to evangelize the urban cities,” which were mostly along the most significant Roman roads

¹⁰ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 11.

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *1-2 Corinthians* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.

¹² Hays, *First Corinthians*, 4.

¹³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 12.

¹⁴ Witherington, 8.

(such as Ephesus, Philippi, and Thessalonica, in addition to Corinth).¹⁵ Acts 18:11 indicates that Paul had spent about eighteen months in Corinth. Paul had written to Corinth at least once before, though the letter mentioned in 1 Cor. 5:9 does not survive.¹⁶ Many scholars date 1 Corinthians to around 53-55 A.D.¹⁷ By nearly all accounts, Paul's authorship of 1 Corinthians is uncontested.

The Corinthian Church

The social setting of the Corinthian church is especially important. Some have speculated that the community had more members of Roman ancestry than Greek ancestry because of the preponderance of Latin names in the Corinthian letters, though there are other plausible explanations for this phenomenon.¹⁸ The congregation had existed for about five years when Paul wrote the first epistle, and there were likely around 200 Christians in the city at that time, meeting among several separate house gatherings. Indeed, meetings of the whole community would have been rare, as even a relatively wealthy patron could only host about fifty at a time. It is thus possible that one source of the conflict within the Corinthian church was divisions among the various house churches themselves, which could naturally tend toward cliquish factionalism.¹⁹ Most members of

¹⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 18.

¹⁶ Gerald L. Borchert, "The Resurrection: 1 Corinthians 15," *Review & Expositor* 80, no. 3 (1983): 401, accessed August 24, 2018, doi:10.1177/003463738308000309.

¹⁷ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 5.

¹⁸ For instance, slaves set free by Romans would have likely taken the Roman name to honor the patron who freed them, though their ethnicity would not be Roman. See Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 28.

¹⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 29.

the community were Gentile converts, but there were a few Jews within the church.²⁰ In fact, up to two-thirds of all Jews in Paul's lifetime did not live in Judea.²¹ The wealthier members of the Corinthian church, like the city at large, experienced "status inconsistency," insofar as they were more upwardly mobile in the colony of Corinth than they would be in Rome.²² It seems that there were "strong" members – likely a small but powerful group of wealthy patrons – who were causing division in the church both in worship and within the leadership.

The Purpose of the Letter

Opinions among scholars are divided as to the exact occasion of the letter, though most agree that – unlike 2 Corinthians – this letter comprises a literary whole that is likely original to Paul. A notable exception to this broad trend in contemporary scholarship is Richard Hays, who argues for the integrity of the letter as a unit but raises doubts about whether the instructions for women to keep silent in chapter 14 are original to Paul.²³ Keener resists seeing an overarching argument to the whole, suggesting its content is not like that of a more formally argued speech.²⁴ Others see eschatological questions about the nature of the resurrection, and its moral and practical implications, as the driving force for the letter.

²⁰ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 6-7.

²¹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 27.

²² Witherington, 23.

²³ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 9.

²⁴ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 135.

For instance, Hays argues for two primary causes for the letter: first, the report from Chloe of serious dissension within the community, and second, that the church had written to him asking for advice on a variety of topics, including sex within marriage and eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols. He is, however, is uncertain as to whether the Corinthians inquired about the resurrection directly or if Paul simply framed his response focused on this as an overarching theme.²⁵ Either way, Hays concludes later that Paul viewed the issue of the resurrection as the “one massive theological fallacy” that undergirded all the problems of the Corinthian church.²⁶ Socio-economic factors certainly played into this as well. Ben Witherington argues that several of the major issues facing the community, including temple meals, eating meat sacrificed to idols, and divisions at the Lord’s Supper all had their basis in “economic as well as....religious background.”²⁷

Chapter 15 in Relation to the Whole

There is broad agreement among commentators that the placement of the argument in 1 Corinthians 15 indicates its importance. In common rhetorical custom, a persuasive speaker would end his speech with the most critical element. Because Paul’s discourse about the resurrection comes at the end of the letter, at something of a crescendo, its importance to his overall argument is clear. N.T. Wright goes so far as to re-narrate the whole argument of 1 Corinthians in the light of chapter 15, seeing its

²⁵ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 5-6. Also: “The indirect manner in which he approaches the topic suggests that it was not one of the matters about which they had written him.” See Hays, 254.

²⁶ Hays, 277.

²⁷ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 28.

themes rehearsed in various places throughout the letter.²⁸ More modestly, Witherington argues that chapter 15 must be read in light of chapters 8-10, and that the groups with whom Paul is contending are identical in both. In other words, the same – likely well-to-do – members of the church who were arguing for eating temple meat were also raising questions about the resurrection of the dead.²⁹ This strikes home for Paul because, as Richard Hays puts it, “Paul’s gospel is fundamentally the story of Jesus crucified and raised from the dead,” thus making chapter 15 a defining chapter in understanding the central thrust of the Apostle’s missionary activity.³⁰ Karl Barth perhaps wrote the definitive statement on the importance of this chapter decades ago when he noted that chapter 15 “forms not only the close and crown of the whole epistle, but also provides the key to its meaning from which light is shed onto the whole, and it becomes intelligible...as a unity.”³¹

The Shape of the Argument

It is possible to view the layout of 1 Corinthians 15 in a variety of ways. Most commentators agree that vv. 12-34 constitute a single move within the larger argument, but differ as to how they break down the opening and closing. For instance, Sampley separates vv. 1-2 and 58 and opening and closing remarks, while viewing 3-11 and 34-57

²⁸ “The best way to work through these problems is to take the walk down the busy street, to move swiftly through the bustling chapters of the letter, and to see for ourselves the various elements that point forward towards the great chapter [15] on resurrection.” N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2003), 280.

²⁹ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 306.

³⁰ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 9.

³¹ Quoted in Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 1169.

as distinct units.³² Craig Keener agrees on vv. 12-34 but treats all of 1-11 and 35-58 as complete moves.³³ Hays treats the sections comprising vv. 1-34 and 35-58 as having their own integrity, though they further break down into 1-11, 12-19, 20-28, 29-34, and 35-49, 50-57, and 58, respectively.³⁴

Witherington, with his focus on Greco-Roman rhetorical forms, points out that this chapter could be read as “a speech in miniature,” and identifies the specific sections one would expect to find in such an oracular pronouncement from antiquity.³⁵ Nonetheless, he actually follows a more standard order for his own exegesis: 1-11, 12-24, and 35-58.³⁶ Wright offers perhaps the most complex breakdown, which is also among the most convincing. On his schema, this chapter is a “carefully composed whole, with a balancing introduction and conclusion...two lengthy main arguments...and a short middle section.” Wright even shows how, on this layout, the various parts of the argument have similar word counts.³⁷ While Thiselton argues “there is...virtually universal agreement about the distinct stages of the argument,” this largely depends on how detailed a breakdown one gives.³⁸ This diversity of views on the structure of the argument serves as a preview of its multifaceted and complex makeup, which is even more contested among the commentators than its structure.

³² Sampley, “The First Letter,” 973.

³³ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 120-121, 129.

³⁴ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 254.

³⁵ Specifically: an *exordium* in vv. 1f, *narration* in vv. 12-19, thesis in v. 20, arguments within the *probation* in vv. 21-50, and a conclusion with vv. 51-58. See Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 292.

³⁶ Witherington, 298.

³⁷ Wright, *Resurrection of the Son*, 312.

³⁸ Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 1177.

Paul begins this critical argument with a restatement of sorts. As Keener notes, it is a mark of a skilled rhetorician to begin from a position of common ground.³⁹ In reminding the Corinthians in vv. 1-2 that he is only reasserting what “I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received” he is simultaneously reminding them both of what they have already accepted and of his position of authority. Paul closes his introductory remarks with an ominous note that foreshadows what is to come: “unless you have come to believe in vain.” Aside from setting up the argument he is about to make, these opening verses are also “a testimony of inestimable value concerning the form in which the gospel was preached to the very first generations of Christians.”⁴⁰

In the first major move of the chapter, comprising vv. 3-11, Paul rehearses in more detail the gospel that he received and handed on (a subtle reminder to the Corinthians that the gospel is passed down, not invented or reshaped at a whim). Some speculate that Paul here is making use of a proto-creed⁴¹ summarizing the story of Jesus. Keener is quite clear that Paul’s language in this section denotes a pre-existing creed.⁴² Hays, likewise, refers to this fourfold confession of faith as “this early creed.”⁴³ Others have suggested that Paul had taught this creed to the church when he was in Corinth around 51-52, having received it himself as early as 35. This, of course, has profound

³⁹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 123.

⁴⁰ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 255.

⁴¹ Manfred Kwiran explicitly calls this “one of the earliest creedal formulations of the church.” See Manfred Kwiran, “The Resurrection of the Dead: 1 Corinthians 15 and Its Interpretation,” *Springfielder* 39, no. 1 (June 1975): 44.

⁴² Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 123.

⁴³ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 255.

implications for the doctrinal development of the earliest Christian movement.⁴⁴ Douglas Campbell, in keeping with the apocalyptic bent of his reading of Paul, notes that in this section we see Paul relying – via the quoted tradition – not on an individual’s appropriation of Christ’s action, but simply on Christ.⁴⁵ For Wright, the obvious effect of vv. 1-11 is to evince the “inauthenticity of an entire stream of twentieth-century New Testament scholarship.”⁴⁶

There are several interesting features in this section that deserve further scrutiny. The lack of an empty tomb in this tradition has caused consternation in many commentators, but Hays is clear: “It certainly does not mean that Paul or any other early Christian could have conceived of a ‘resurrection from the dead’ in which the body remained in the tomb.”⁴⁷ The use of sins rather than the more characteristic⁴⁸ “sin” is noteworthy in v. 3, and perhaps lends further credence to the argument that Paul is quoting a pre-existing statement. Paul describes the appearances of the resurrected Christ in chronological order, but leaves out any mention of women. The use of “twelve” likely denotes a figure of speech, as Paul would have been aware of Judas’ death. This could even indicate a translation from a Semitic original, though it is difficult to be certain.⁴⁹ Scholars largely agree he is quoting an existing tradition here, but differ on where Paul

⁴⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 301. He also notes here that Paul does not refer to Jesus’ appearance to him as a vision, but believed it was of a piece with the other appearances he recites.

⁴⁵ Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013), 893. Campbell earlier referred to the tradition Paul is handing on as “shared creedal material,” 842.

⁴⁶ More to the point: “But in fact Bultmann was simply wrong...” Wright, *The Resurrection*, 317.

⁴⁷ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 256.

⁴⁸ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 123.

⁴⁹ Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 1204.

adds his own evidence to the already established litany of witnesses. The mention of “more than 500 brothers” (v. 6) sounds like an invitation to ask around, according to Keener.⁵⁰ In any case, Paul is convinced that Jesus appeared to those mentioned in this recounting “in a visually perceptible, bodily form.”⁵¹

Rather than boast in his apostleship, Paul downplays it. He does this in two ways. First, by mentioning Jesus’ appearance to him last, and second by referring to himself as one “untimely born,” as the NRSV renders v. 8. This is perhaps an overly genteel translation. Witherington translates it as “miscarriage,” or “the abortion,”⁵² while Keener prefers “stillborn.”⁵³ Hays likewise notes that the Greek *ektroma* normally refers to an aborted fetus, and further suggests the possibility that this was a term of derision that some detractors had applied to Paul. By claiming the title himself, Paul would have taken away its sting.⁵⁴ For Witherington, this “self-deprecation” was a common tactic among trained rhetors in the first century.⁵⁵ Indeed, Paul leans into his second-class status, reiterating in v. 9 that he is the “least of all the apostles,” due to his persecution of the early church. But he downplays his apostolic heritage in part to play up his work; though, the Apostle adds quickly, it was not his work, but “the grace of God that is with me” in v.

⁵⁰ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 124.

⁵¹ Ronald J. Sider, “St. Paul’s Understanding of the Nature and Significance of the Resurrection in I Corinthians XV 1-19,” *Novum Testamentum* 19, no. 2 (1977): 140, accessed August 25, 2018, doi:10.1163/156853677x00093.

⁵² Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 300.

⁵³ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 125.

⁵⁴ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 258.

⁵⁵ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 300-301.

10. This is why – in a callback to the warning in v. 2 – he can say God’s grace toward him has not been in vain.

Beginning with v. 12, the heart of Paul’s concern comes in view. As J. Paul Sampley notes, the main point of Paul’s argument is to contend for the resurrection of the dead, not the resurrection of Jesus.⁵⁶ Paul’s rhetoric assumes that the Corinthians share the belief in Jesus’ resurrection (otherwise he would be begging the question, and it would not be persuasive). Because he can start from this position, he engages in what Keener calls a *reductio ad absurdum* argument: to deny the resurrection of the dead, of which Jesus’ resurrection is a preview,⁵⁷ is to deny that which makes it possible – that is, Easter itself.⁵⁸ This verse, according to one scholar, “first sums up the content of the preached gospel, with specific focus on Christ’s resurrection, and then indignantly confronts the Corinthians with the illogic of their disbelief.”⁵⁹

Here it is helpful to examine the assumptions in first century Judaism, and the wider Greco-Roman culture, about resurrection. In Pharisaic Judaism belief in a resurrection was common (practically demanded by Daniel 12:2), while the Sadducees of the period rejected the teaching.⁶⁰ Though Paul is preaching and teaching from a traditional Hebraic worldview, it is possible that he is being rejected by some in Corinth who view him as “an unsophisticated, literalist Jewish preacher” due to their own cultured division between the spiritual and physical, which they regarded as more

⁵⁶ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 979.

⁵⁷ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 127; also Sampley, 981.

⁵⁸ Keener, 126.

⁵⁹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 259.

⁶⁰ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 122.

intellectually palatable.⁶¹ Witherington strikes a similar note when he argues that some at Corinth “had spiritualized Christ’s resurrection, much like many have today,” and therefore would have rejected the resurrection of the dead as a matter of course.⁶² Indeed, James Dunn does precisely this, along with more egregious interpreters like John Shelby Spong.⁶³

A common question in New Testament scholarship has been whether the Corinthians had an over-realized eschatology that thereby necessitated Paul’s extended treatment in 1 Corinthians 15.⁶⁴ Hays argues the only verse that could indicate this is v. 21, but quickly notes this verse by no means demands such an interpretation.⁶⁵ Witherington assumes the presence of this doctrinal error, and links it to the (predominantly) gentile converts at Corinth who carried Greco-Roman assumptions about the afterlife with them into the church (as, he notes, v. 29 indicates). Pagan religion was practiced mainly for present, this-worldly benefits, and thus some of the Corinthian Christians held onto this assumption, at least initially.⁶⁶ Roetzel hedges somewhat, describing the opponents that Paul faced as “religious enthusiasts” who

either claimed they were already raised and therefore in need of no future resurrection, or they shared a Greek aversion to the body that made the idea of the resurrection of the body repulsive.⁶⁷

⁶¹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 259.

⁶² Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 302.

⁶³ Paul Barnett, “The Apostle Paul, the Bishop of Newark, and the Resurrection of Jesus,” *Crux* 20, no. 2 (September 1999): 11. Accessed September 24, 2018.

⁶⁴ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 980.

⁶⁵ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 264.

⁶⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 292-293.

⁶⁷ Calvin J. Roetzel, ““As Dying, and Behold We Live,”” *Union Seminary Review* 46, no. 1 (January 1992): 7, accessed August 24, 2018, doi:10.1177/002096439204600102.

Wright is more forceful, drawing on Hays to argue that, “the problem at Corinth was not too much eschatology but not nearly enough,” because some in the church were trying to blend Christian revelation with “pagan philosophy.”⁶⁸

Going back to the argument in v. 12-34, the consequences of the rejection of the resurrection are legion. Paul proceeds to unfurl a list of consequences that follow if indeed Christ is not raised from the dead:⁶⁹ Paul and his companions’ proclamation is in vain, the faith of the Corinthians is in vain, and they have all in fact been “misrepresenting God” and they remain in their sins. Here one again observes why, for the Apostle, this question is of utmost importance. “For Paul,” one scholar notes succinctly, “there is no salvation without the bodily resurrection of Jesus.”⁷⁰ Hays effectively sums up the dramatic consequences, from a Pauline perspective, of calling the resurrection of Jesus into question (either directly, or, in the case of the Corinthians, by implication):

For Paul, the whole web of Christian discourse is airy nonsense if it is not anchored in the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. Christian preaching becomes a system of delusions, offering nothing but lies and empty gestures. The gospel has no power to save us if Christ is not raised, and therefore the Corinthians are still lost in their sins, their hope of reconciliation with God based on futile human fantasy.⁷¹

Beginning in v. 20, Paul turns to a vigorous restatement of his teaching about the resurrection, referring to Christ as the “first fruits” of those who died. This is related to

⁶⁸ Wright, *The Resurrection*, 279.

⁶⁹ “It was a regular practice for a rhetor to try to refute an argument by showing that its logical consequences were unacceptable and thus that the logic must be flawed.” See Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 303.

⁷⁰ Witherington, 299.

⁷¹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 260.

the harvest, the first part of which was a promise of more to come.⁷² Hays notes that Paul, interpreting events along traditional Jewish apocalyptic lines, views the resurrection of Jesus as a sign of the inbreaking of the end of the age, the beginning of God's great harvest. "If Christ had been raised," says Hays, summing up Paul's thinking, "then the resurrection of others must follow in due course."⁷³ Jacob Thiessen posits that Paul's reference to first fruits is connected to the 'third day' references in the proto-creed in v. 4, and identifies the harvest specifically as the barley harvest on 16th Nisan.⁷⁴

Intertwined with his image of the first fruits is Paul's use of an Adam/Christ typology.⁷⁵ It is significant that this is the first mention of Adam in the letter, and that Paul mentions Adam in a way that makes clear he expects his readers to have a grasp of Genesis 1-3.⁷⁶ While Paul's rhetoric here is broad in scope, i.e. "all will be made alive in Christ," this is not an endorsement of universalism, but rather an indication that he is speaking chiefly of the community of the faithful. There is nothing explicit in this argument about the state of unbelievers in the Parousia.⁷⁷

Also in this section is apocalyptic language related to the future fulfillment of the resurrection of the dead. In v. 24, we find a rare use of kingdom language for Paul, in

⁷² Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 127; also Sampley, 981.

⁷³ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 263.

⁷⁴ Jacob Thiessen, "Firstfruits and the Day of Christ's Resurrection: An Examination of the Relationship Between the 'Third Day' in 1 Cor 15:4 and the 'Firstfruit' in 1 Cor. 15:20," *Neotestamentica* 46, no. 2 (2012): 379, accessed August 24, 2018.

⁷⁵ Sampley, "The First Letter," 981.

⁷⁶ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 263.

⁷⁷ Hays, 264.

reference to Christ handing it over to the Father after victory over death has been won.⁷⁸

The reference to the trumpet later in the verse may have in view a climactic final battle, though Keener notes it could have other connotations.⁷⁹ Hays is fully invested in an apocalyptic reading of this section, pointing out that language of “rule,” “power,” and “authority” are a direct challenge to imperial Roman pretensions. Paul wants his divided church in Corinth to experience a “conversion of the imagination” that sees the resurrection of the dead as one of many ways the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead stands in authority over all of Caesar’s might.⁸⁰

The language in v. 24 of “hand[ing] over” the kingdom to the Father could be read, at first glance, as having subordinationist undertones. Sampley suggests that the main thrust of Paul’s language here is to emphasize the absolute authority of the Father and the completed work of the Son, but not to suggest that Christ, in being or in function, is somehow less than the First Person of the Trinity.⁸¹ More significantly, Paul is drawing implicitly on Psalm 110:1. Though not a direct quote, “Paul offers the earliest documentation of a Christological exegesis” for the Psalms.⁸²

In v. 29, Paul circles back to an earlier section in his argument to illustrate further practices that the denial of the resurrection of the dead renders obsolete. Included here is one of the strangest, most controversial, and least understood passages not only in the Corinthian correspondence, but in the whole Pauline corpus. The Apostle raises the

⁷⁸ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 984.

⁷⁹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 133.

⁸⁰ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 265.

⁸¹ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 982.

⁸² Thiselton, *The First Epistle*, 1234.

objection that, if the dead are not resurrected, their practice of baptizing on behalf of the dead becomes useless. Importantly, Paul uses this example as a consequence but does not endorse its efficacy.⁸³ Sampley offers a number of ways this has been interpreted by scholars attempting to reduce the embarrassment of this passage, though he does not find any of them convincing.⁸⁴ Keener, with less interest in the question, simply notes that we do not have access to the meaning of Paul's "theological shorthand" which the Corinthians most assuredly would have understood.⁸⁵ Witherington, illustrating his characteristic interest in social-rhetorical factors, suggests that the Greco-Roman trust in ritual may be at play here, or possibly concerns over cremation (in which case proxy baptism becomes a sort of insurance.)⁸⁶ In any case, Paul is referring to a liturgical practice connected to the Easter hope which is yet another example of activities that are rendered meaningless if there is no resurrection of the dead.

This is followed by a more personal example from Paul. Not only is the liturgical life of the Corinthians rendered hollow if the resurrection is a farce, but Paul's own calling would likewise come into question. Speaking on behalf of himself and his companions (one of which would likely read the letter out loud to the church), Paul asks why they endanger themselves for a lie. Paul juxtaposes in v. 31 his certainty or "boast" over the Corinthians with the certainty that he "dies" every day. As an example, he then mentions in v. 32 fighting with "wild animals" at Ephesus, something that would not be

⁸³ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 305.

⁸⁴ Sampley, "The First Letter," 982.

⁸⁵ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 130.

⁸⁶ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 294.

to his gain unless, again, the dead are raised as a first fruits of Jesus' own resurrection.

Most scholars, like Sampley⁸⁷ and Keener⁸⁸, agree that Paul here is speaking figuratively about conflicts with humans, though the image would have been familiar to cultured Corinthians who were aware of gladiatorial combat against ravenous beasts.

Paul uses *reductio ad absurdum* once more to close out this section. He quotes the Hebrew Scriptures directly, noting in v. 32 that if the dead are not raised they should, "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die." The ethical lesson here is strong: the resurrection of the dead has implications for the life of the living. To this in v. 33 Paul adds a warning, "Bad company corrupts good morals," which is a quote from the poet Menander. This seems like an odd and random insertion, but it speaks both to Paul's familiarity with the broader Greco-Roman culture of his day, and also serves to condemn the high-status Corinthians with words from one of their own pagan authors.⁸⁹ Dale Martin suggests a not-so-subtle jab on Paul's part here: such a bracing, out of place quote "may indicate that he believes the Corinthians' skepticism to be due to influences from other sources."⁹⁰ Paul concludes the section in v. 34 with a warning to "sin no more," and a reminder that many have no knowledge of God, thus much is at stake.

With v. 35, there begins a new phase of Paul's argument, getting to the heart of the questions that some in Corinth are raising. Having reminded the Corinthians of the primordial teaching that they were in danger of losing, Paul turns to specifics. To do this,

⁸⁷ Sampley, "The First Letter," 992.

⁸⁸ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 128.

⁸⁹ Keener, 129.

⁹⁰ Quoted in Hays, *First Corinthians*, 269.

he makes use of a rhetorical device, a fictional interlocutor who poses questions he will answer in turn.⁹¹ This was a common technique used in ancient speeches, as it allowed a specific answer without having to attack particular questioners, and it is especially common in the diatribe form of teaching.⁹² By answering “someone” in v. 35, Paul is not questioning the faithfulness or intelligence of anyone in Corinth, but still able to anticipate an objection and provide an answer for it. This is even more important, since Paul begins in v. 36 by calling his fictional sparring partner “fool!”⁹³

Paul proceeds by means of an analogy from everyday life: seeds must “die” to become something new (v. 36). While this is “botanically untrue,” as Witherington wryly notes, the image serves the pastor’s purpose well.⁹⁴ When the “something new” arrives, it is given a “flesh” appropriate to it; heavenly and earthly bodies have different kinds of glory, and even stars are each different in their respective glory. The seed analogy allows Paul to do justice both to the transformation the body undergoes at the resurrection and to its basic continuity with what has gone before.⁹⁵ From this Paul goes into a series of contrasts – rhetorically, making use of anaphora and antithesis⁹⁶ – to differentiate the resurrection body from what precedes it. According to Richard Hays, Daniel 12:2-3 is particularly important as background for Paul’s argument here. One of the few places

⁹¹ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 986-987.

⁹² Hays, *First Corinthians*, 269.

⁹³ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 130.

⁹⁴ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 307.

⁹⁵ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 270.

⁹⁶ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 131.

where a resurrection is specifically mentioned in the Old Testament, it has clear resonances with this section of chapter 15:

² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.⁹⁷

Note that Paul applies a similar differentiation in v. 45 to the “first” and “last” Adam, returning to the Adam/Christ analogy utilized above. He quotes Genesis directly as well as indirectly to press his point, referring in vv. 47-49 to Adam as “a man of dust” and Christ the “second man” as one from heaven. He continues to draw explicitly from Genesis to refer to the *imago dei*, though in a somewhat modified way. Humans now bear “the image of the man of dust,” but when saved will eventually “bear the image of the man of heaven.” (v. 49) This theme of the restoration of the divine image was picked up by John Wesley and made a key aspect of the soteriology that he and his movement developed.⁹⁸

The Nature of the Resurrection

Of particular interest, and also the source of much controversy in New Testament scholarship, is the interpretation of v. 44: “It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.” Scholars have drawn widely divergent conclusions about the distinction that Paul is driving at between

⁹⁷ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 271.

⁹⁸ Commenting on v. 49, the Methodist founding father refers to that image simply, but movingly, as “holiness and glory.” See John Wesley, “Chapter XV,” *The Wesley Center Online: Notes On St Paul's First Epistle To The Corinthians*. Accessed October 27, 2018. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesleys-notes-on-the-bible/notes-on-st-pauls-first-epistle-to-the-corinthians/#Chapter XV>.

the *psychikon soma* (natural/physical body) and *pneumatikon soma* (spiritual body).

Hays, for instance, takes issue with the NRSV's translation of both, arguing that *psychikon* "certainly does not mean 'physical'" and that "spiritual body" is misleading. Instead, he suggests that *pneumatikon* means a body that is "determined by the spirit and gives the spirit form and local habitation," not a body somehow made of spirit.⁹⁹ This is not necessarily the same body, of course – Paul knew, as all do today, that bodies can decay to nothing – but he does affirm "it will be the same person or personality in the new body." So Paul, on this account, is arguing for a body inhabited by the same person.¹⁰⁰

Of course, the body is not the same as before. James Ware notes, "the resurrection [here] is understood as the revivication and glorious transformation to immortality of the mortal body of flesh."¹⁰¹ Jerry Sumney similarly observes that Paul's goal is not to convince the Corinthians of the soul's immortality but rather the "fullness of what God intends," which "comes only as embodied existence, a gift of the Parousia."¹⁰² This is neither a new nor minority reading of Paul. John Chrysostom concluded centuries ago, as one scholar relates, that "Christ was physically resurrected and therefore all other human

⁹⁹ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 272.

¹⁰⁰ Thus the seed analogy is all the more fitting; the plant is not the same as the seed, it is profoundly different, but its essence is the same and it is in fundamental continuity with what came before. See Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 308.

¹⁰¹ James Ware, "Paul's Understanding of the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:36–54," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 4 (2014): 835, accessed August 24, 2018, doi:10.1353/jbl.2014.0055.

¹⁰² Jerry Sumney, "Post-Mortem Existence and Resurrection of the Body in Paul," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31, no. 1 (2009): 26, accessed August 24, 2018, doi:10.1163/187122009x419925.

beings share this privilege.”¹⁰³ The Reformers also read 1 Corinthians 15 in like manner.

In his commentary Martin Luther stated, with his classic punch, that these verses contain:

in a lump the Gospel and everything that is proclaimed of Christ and of God. For all of this is linked together like a chain, and if one article of faith stands, they all stand.¹⁰⁴

One might add, if one link fails – and this link, particularly, for Paul – they all fail.

To wit: not all commentators read Paul this way. James D.G. Dunn, representing a more modernist interpretation, explicitly rejects the notion that the resurrection body Paul preaches is a physical body. In a somewhat puzzling comment on Thistleton’s more traditional exegesis, he states: “My only query...is whether he has too much confused ‘body’ with ‘physical body.’”¹⁰⁵ In his conclusion, Dunn states again, “the resurrection body will be other, no longer flesh and blood...beyond the reach of corruption and atrophy, and vivified by the life-giving Spirit.”¹⁰⁶ While Dunn is not alone in his exegesis,¹⁰⁷ he is clearly going against the grain of the consensus understanding of Paul on this point, as represented by the canonical sources of the undivided church including

¹⁰³ Chris L. de Wet, “John Chrysostom’s Exegesis on the Resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15,” *Neotestamentica* 45, no. 1 (2011): 111.

¹⁰⁴ David P. Scaer, “Luther’s Concept of the Resurrection in His Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (July 1983): 214. J. Paul Sampley also describes Paul’s logic here as a “chain-like argument.” See Sampley, 975.

¹⁰⁵ James D.G. Dunn, “How Are the Dead Raised? With What Body do They Come? Reflections on 1 Corinthians 15,” *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 45, no. 1 (Fall 2002): 17. Accessed August 24, 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Dunn, 18. He continues: “Not a complete answer by any means. But an answer whose subtlety has not been sufficiently appreciated.” Referring to a clear break with the tradition that some might name heresy as unappreciated nuance is a rather interesting rhetorical ploy. It is unclear throughout what a non-physical body might mean.

¹⁰⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson strikes a similar chord when he collapses Christology into pneumatology in the conclusion to his exploration of this chapter: “The exalted Lord Jesus is life-giving Spirit and the source of the power that touches and transforms the Corinthians.” See Luke Timothy Johnson, “Life-Giving Spirit: The Ontological Implications of Resurrection in 1 Corinthians,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 15, no. 1 (2012): 88, accessed August 24, 2018, doi:10.1163/9789004242982_017.

not only Scripture, but the creeds, ecumenical councils, iconography, and teachings of the Fathers and Mothers.¹⁰⁸ There is solid reason to believe not only that Paul's main purpose in this chapter was to ensure the Corinthians of a future bodily¹⁰⁹ and yet incorruptible existence, but also that this was Paul's conviction throughout his ministry.¹¹⁰ Something of an enigma remains, though, and thus Paul Ramsey's phrasing – "ensouled body" or "embodied soul" – may help to capture the dynamic to which classic exegesis points.¹¹¹

This argument continues, from a new angle, starting with v. 50. Paul's "What I am saying..." signals an attempt to clarify what has just been written, but not a fundamental discontinuity in subject. He describes what comes forward as a "mystery." To read this as some esoteric bit of questioning with no answer would be an anachronism; the technical meaning of a mystery is "a piece of hidden knowledge about God's preordained purposes now disclosed through revelation." It is a mystery that has been peeled back, or solved, in other words.¹¹²

Sampley notes that this is one of only two places in the undisputed Pauline corpus in which Paul highlights a contrast between the present and the future state. In most instances, the Apostle wants to stress that the Parousia has been inaugurated through the

¹⁰⁸ See William J. Abraham, Jason E. Vickers, and Natalie B. Van. Kirk, *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology and the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2008).

¹⁰⁹ "But the thesis of an ethereal resurrection body in Paul depends on such a pantheistic and Stoic reading of Paul and collapses without it." James Ware, "Paul's Understanding," 834.

¹¹⁰ Contra some scholars who question whether Paul's views changed by the time he wrote the fragments which became 2 Corinthians. See Ben F. Meyer, "Did Paul's View of the Resurrection of the Dead Undergo Development?" *Theological Studies* 47, no. 3 (September 1986): 382, accessed August 24, 2018, doi:10.1177/004056398604700301.

¹¹¹ Quoted in Brent Waters, "Whose Temple Is It Anyway? Embodiment, Mortality, and Resurrection," *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 42, doi:10.1177/193979091400700105.

¹¹² Hays, *First Corinthians*, 274.

death and resurrection of Jesus. Here, however, as he is stressing the promise of the future to his confused flock in Corinth, Paul wants to assure them of what they hold in doubt: There will indeed be a resurrection to come to come for all those that are dead, and even those who are alive at the return of Christ will be changed.¹¹³ In either case, the “perishable” must put on the “imperishable,” at the last trumpet. Again this trumpet signals the gathering for a final battle. Here Paul is once more in continuity with his Pharisaic roots. Hays notes that the trumpet as a sign of “the day of the Lord” is a common feature of Jewish apocalyptic literature.¹¹⁴ The final battle, pitting God’s agent and kingdom versus all that stands in God’s way, is at issue; the ultimate showdown with death itself is thus being portrayed.¹¹⁵

Paul emphasizes this in his judicious reworking of the biblical material quoted in vv. 54a-55. Hays notes the similarity to Hosea 13:14, but argues it is unclear if Paul means it to be a direct allusion or if he’s simply writing from his profound Scriptural memory.¹¹⁶ Either way, it is clear here why the very heart of the gospel – life and death itself – is at stake for Paul, and for the church today, in these verses.¹¹⁷ Interestingly, as Witherington points out, vv. 54f is the only place Paul quotes something from the Old Testament as a prophecy yet to be fulfilled.¹¹⁸ Augustine contrasts the benefits bestowed by baptism with that of Christ’s resurrection, noting, “In baptism iniquity is blotted out,

¹¹³ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 988.

¹¹⁴ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 274.

¹¹⁵ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 989.

¹¹⁶ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 276.

¹¹⁷ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 992.

¹¹⁸ Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 310.

but weakness remains. But in the resurrection there will be no iniquity and weakness will be destroyed.”¹¹⁹

The argument concludes in v. 58 with a summary statement by Paul, encouraging the Corinthians to be “steadfast,” assured that their work has meaning and value. There is a similarity here to Paul’s admonitions in Galatians 4:9 and 5:7 to be vigilant in the face of false teaching. The Galatians, of course, were also faced with a question that cut to the heart of the gospel, and Paul responded with even more ferocity. The basic message is the same, though: “stay the course.”¹²⁰ While most scholars see v. 58 as a logical conclusion, perhaps even an *inclusio*, Keener argues that this is not so clear a conclusion as has usually been assumed.¹²¹ Hays, with a common perspective among commentators, sees v. 58 as a true epilogue, though acknowledges it could seem at first glance as a bit anticlimactic compared to all that has come before it. Witherington, for instance, suggests that while v. 58 may be the logical conclusion for the argument found in chapter 15, the true rhetorical ending (peroration) does not appear until 16:15ff.¹²² Still, Hays makes a strong case that this is indeed a fitting conclusion to the argument, for

Paul has come full circle back to the theme of verses 1-2: he wants his readers to stand fast and hold firmly to the gospel. Those who affirm the truth of Christ’s resurrection will be given the moral confidence to live in a way that shows their hope is not in vain.¹²³

¹¹⁹ Judith L. Kovacs, *1 Corinthians: Interpreted by Early Christian Commentators* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 280.

¹²⁰ Sampley, “The First Letter,” 991.

¹²¹ Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 135.

¹²² Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 292.

¹²³ Hays, *First Corinthians*, 277.

1 Corinthians 15 Today

The implications of this robust pericope for the ministry of the local church are significant. If Paul is right, as most scholars agree, that he is here addressing a central question for the life of the church in Corinth, it is at least possible that it remains a crucial issue for the church today. Indeed, as Witherington shows, the resurrection of Christ has implications not only for the future resurrected state of the church triumphant, but for the ongoing, faithful work of the church militant.¹²⁴ It is only because of the glory to come that our work now is not in vain. It is only because the doctrine of the resurrection affirms the goodness of creation and the fulsome beauty of a full-orbed biblical eschatology that the church can carry out its ministry with a sense of hope and joy, knowing that it is anticipating the world to come. Indeed, if readers were to conclude that Paul was wrong, or that the church has been misguided in her understanding of Paul (as notorious heresiarchs like John Shelby Spong have concluded), “then Christian ministry is a waste of time and a serious error.”¹²⁵

Indeed, if Paul has been read rightly, ministry only makes sense because followers of Jesus are going with the grain of the new creation for which the resurrection is the “first fruits”. (v. 20) 1 Corinthians 15 gives the church good reason to invest deeply in teaching about the person of Christ, unapologetically and urgently, because without the risen Christ all are still in their sins and Christians are of all people to be pitied. Thanks be to God, this is not the case. “Because of Easter, we preachers are not permitted to

¹²⁴ “For Paul resurrection, both Christ’s and the Christian’s, is the basis for a new moral order.” Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 311.

¹²⁵ Barnett, “The Apostle Paul,” 11.

despair.”¹²⁶ Nor is anyone who is baptized into Christ, for in the words of the ancient Eastern liturgy, “Christ is risen from the dead trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life!”

This same zeal inspired the generations who lived after Paul and the apostles. Proclaiming Christ as the risen Lord was central to the vision of the church Fathers in their preaching and teaching. One excellent example of this is Gregory Nazianzus, who preached on the identity of Christ knowing there were heretical teachings flourishing in the church of his day. Both the content of his preaching and the tone and emphasis of his orations show that, just as Paul was concerned with the Christology of his congregations, false teaching rears its head in every generation and must be dealt with directly. Like Paul, Nazianzen’s work will serve as both model and content for this project.

¹²⁶ William H. Willimon, “Preaching as Demonstration of Resurrection,” Easter 2014 p. 15 *Journal for Preachers* 37, no. 3 (Easter 2014): 15. Accessed September 24, 2018.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Among the Cappadocian Fathers, St. Gregory of Nazianzus stands out for his contributions to Christian doctrine and his failure as a bishop. The brother of the venerable Basil and mutual friend to another Gregory, Gregory of Nyssa, Nazianzus was active in the period when what is now called the Nicene Creed was finalized at Constantinople. Among his most important works are the *Theological Orations*, which spell out his doctrine of God amidst great division and controversy. This essay will focus on two of these works, Orations 29 and 30, which deal in particular with the Second Person of the Trinity. Furthermore, what follows will primarily examine that part of Gregory's Christology commonly called the person of Christ, addressing the identity of the Son, rather than the work of Christ (the atonement and related doctrines). As will be explored, however, these categories are difficult to maintain neatly.

Though not named explicitly, his opponents in these addresses are a faction called the Eunomians, who wished to maintain a strict division between the substance of the Father and the Son.¹ Known also as "Anomeans," meaning "dissimilarians," they are sometimes today referred to as a form of Arianism. They are more commonly known as

¹ Gregory Nazianzus, Frederick Williams, and Lionel R. Wickham, *On God and Christ: The Five Theological Orations and Two Letters to Cledonius* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimirs Seminary Press, 2002), 15.

Eunomians after the faction's most prominent leader, the Cappadocian Eunomius (d. 393). Eunomius was the most prominent student of Aetius, an Antiochian who distanced himself both from Arian teaching and the eventual Nicene settlement. While Aetius was eventually ordained bishop and led a small faction loyal to he and Eunomius, it collapsed under Theodosius' laws against heresy. Lionel Wickham's conclusion is insightful: "Their Church...had, like all one-issue groups, only an infirm hold on a perduring existence. Founded on doctrinal purity it perished on it."²

The church eventually sided with Gregory and his compatriots, and mainstream Cappadocian theology rejected Eunomian doctrine explicitly. The questions raised in these Orations, however, are every bit as relevant today, for there will always be sects and false teachers who question the orthodox consensus and, in particular, seek to make Christ something less than fully and completely God. This essay will explore several themes in Nazianzus' Orations. First, it will examine his argument for the language that is to be used for the Son. Next, it will turn to Nazianzen's discussion of time, responding to criticisms about the generation of the Son. Thirdly, this chapter will explore Gregory's discussion of the relationship of the Son to the other Persons of the Trinity, in particular the Father (the main point of departure from his Eunomian opponents), and the soteriological import of his conclusions. This essay then turns to Nazianzus' epistemology, and concludes with a look at his rhetorical style. As a church leader who was in the midst of fighting heresy in his own pews, Nazianzen's Orations served as an instructive historical inspiration for this project.

² Lionel Wickham, "Introduction," *Theological Orations*, 17.

Language for the Son

In Orations 29 and 30, one of Nazianzen's chief concerns is utilizing the precise language for the Second Person of the Trinity. Near the opening of Oration 29, he argues that the idea of "involuntary generation" belongs to the natural world and is thus not proper terminology for Christian reflection, preferring instead distinctly Christian referents. "This," he notes, "is why we limit ourselves to Christian terms and speak of 'the Ingenerate,' 'the Begotten,' and (as God the Word himself does in one passage) 'what proceeds from the Father.'"³ It is significant that he says "we" limit ourselves to Christian grammar, indicating that he believes he speaks not only for himself but for the church. For Gregory, the language that is proper to theological discourse is the language of revelation mediated through the Spirit-led community.

This does not mean, of course, that simply repeating the language of Scripture, or even directly quoting it, guarantees that one is free from error. Thus Gregory challenges his opponents:

Now that we know just how invincible you are in logical twists, let us see what strength you can muster from Holy Scriptures. Perhaps you may undertake to win us over with them.⁴

While the language of the Bible is superior to any other for inquiring into the church's teaching, Nazianzen warns his listeners with a sort of ominous foreshadowing that even inspired words may be used against the faithful. At the opening of Oration 30, he sums up his approach to such challenges, his, "solution," as "allocating the more elevated, the more distinctly divine expressions of the Scripture to the Godhead, the humbler and more

³ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 70.

⁴ Nazianzus, 84.

human to the New Adam.”⁵ Even if imprecise, Gregory clearly wishes to equip his hearers with a way of determining truth from error in such disputations.

Nazianzen also demonstrates a keen sense of intertextuality in his exegetical method when confronting criticisms of orthodox Christology. For instance, when dealing with the problem of Christ being referred to in the gospels as, at various points, both equal to and below the Father, he retorts:

Certainly, supposing the Father were called ‘greater’ with no mention of the Son’s being ‘equal,’ they might have a point here. But if it is clear that we find both...what strength does their case have? How can there be harmony between incompatible terms? It is impossible for the same thing to be, in a like respect, greater than and equal to the same thing. Is it not clear that the superiority belongs to the cause and the equality to the nature?⁶

With great pastoral concern, Gregory hereby seeks to empower his audience not only to answer specific critiques about the divinity of Christ, but also to validate sincere questions that would arise naturally from any serious reading of the biblical narratives. While today a reader might reply that not everything that is clear to a theologian as brilliant as Nazianzen would be obvious to novices, his pastorally sensitive intertextual work remains a helpful patristic example of exegesis for the church today.

Despite these extended arguments about the nature of Scripture and its faithful interpretation for theology, Gregory is also cognizant of the limits of language when speaking of the things of God. Ruminating on Israel’s tradition of not using God’s proper name, the Theologian commends the respect for God’s ineffable nature inherent in that practice: “No man has yet breathed all the air; no mind has yet contained or language

⁵ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 93.

⁶ Nazianzus, 98.

embraced God's substance in its fullness." The implication is here that Christians should embrace an epistemic humility, in recognition that our highest, most beautiful, fully orthodox ruminations only amount to "a faint and feeble mental image" of the sacred mysteries at the heart of the gospel.⁷

Time

In these Orations, Gregory also addresses critics of Nicene Christianity who raised questions about time related to the Second Person of the Trinity. In Oration 29 he poses, and answers, a series of questions in quick succession, which read almost like a catechism. The Theologian, in responding to a fictive query about the timing of the Son and the Spirit's generation, notes that these processes transcend "whenness," but offers that they originate whenever the Father did. Gregory calls this "a naïve answer," likely because he immediately adds, "there has never been a 'when' when the Father has not been in existence."

To drive his point home, he interrogates the issue further. Note again, in this section, the quick catechetical style when he asks,

Since when has the Son been begotten?
 Since as long as the Father has not been begotten.
Since when has the Spirit been proceeding?
 Since as long as the Son has not been proceeding but being begotten in a non-temporal way that transcends explanation.

Thus, though the Word and the Holy Spirit are co-eternal with the Father, they are not co-originate. "They are from him," the Theologian says, "though not after him." He sums up

⁷ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 107.

this line of inquiry by noting, “the sources of time are not subject to time.”⁸ Later in the same oration, he seems to backtrack a bit on the question of the eternal begetting of the Father. Responding to an (again, rhetorical) inquiry suggesting that an end to begetting must imply a beginning thereof, he clarifies, “I am not committing myself to saying whether or not the process of being begotten is eternal” until he does a close examination of a particular biblical text. However, he does refute the basic argument that something which ends demands a beginning.⁹

He applies this same logic to biblical titles and characteristics for the Son, listing over a dozen and adding, “None of them is a later acquisition, none became attached at a later stage to the Son or to the Spirit any more than to the Father....it was never the case that he was without his Word.”¹⁰ He drives it home further:

He whom presently you scorn was once transcendent, even over you. He who is presently human was incomposite. He remained what he was; what he was not, he assumed.¹¹

It is clear Nazianzen takes questions about the equal divinity of Christ with utmost seriousness. Inquiries into the eternality of the Word are thus a first order matter for what is a dominant theme in these Orations, and into which we will dive into more thoroughly now. To conclude this line of examination, however, it is worth noting that Gregory ends Oration 30 with yet another reference to time as it relates to the Son by alluding to

⁸ Nazianzus, 71. Emphasis in original.

⁹ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 80-81.

¹⁰ Nazianzus, 85.

¹¹ Nazianzus, 86. The Theologian strikes a similar note in Oration 30, discussing the multiple levels of meaning about what is often called the already/not yet of Christ's reign. See Nazianzus, 95.

Hebrews: “Above all, keep hold of this truth...and you will never fail: Jesus Christ in body and spirit the same, yesterday, today, and forever. Amen.”¹²

Christology and Trinity

This brings us to the more dominant Christological strands in Orations 29 and 30, which chiefly concern the qualities of the Son’s relationship to the other persons of the Trinity. In particular, Gregory deals extensively with the relationship between the Son and the Father, the meaning of his begottenness, his equality with the First Person of the Trinity, and his corporeality. Early on in Oration 29, Nazianzen sums up the nature of this relationship by a brief comparison to atheism and polytheism. This is a monotheism, he insists, not of a single person but of a “single rule produced by equality of nature, harmony of will, [and] identity of action” such that “there is numerical distinction” but “not division in substance.”¹³ Indeed, the only distinction between the persons is not in substance but in relation to one another. Thus, in Oration 30, he summarizes again: “The personal name of the unoriginated is ‘Father’; of the eternally begotten, ‘Son’; of what has issued, or proceeds, without generation, ‘the Holy Spirit.’”¹⁴

Naturally, Gregory’s Christology is bound up in his doctrine of the Trinity, and the relationship between the Father and the Son. In Oration 29, he answers an imaginary interlocutor who questions how one could be a Father or a Son and yet be eternal and unchanging. The Theologian responds that one who “did not begin his existence” could

¹² Nazianzus, 112.

¹³ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 70.

¹⁴ Nazianzus, 109. Divergent teachings over the procession of the Spirit would later, of course, greatly contribute to the schism between East and West.

eternally be a Father, just as the Son is one “in the true sense” because, unlike us, the Second Person of the Trinity (in terms of his begotten nature, not his incarnation) can be a son without being a father as well.¹⁵ Similarly, he takes pains to show that “Father” is not a name for a unique substance or a particular activity – the former would lead to tritheism and the latter to modalism – but for a relationship. “Just as with us,” he explains, “these names indicate kindred and affinity, so here too they designate the sameness of stock, of parent and offspring.”¹⁶

These questions are fleshed out further in Oration 30, as St. Gregory addresses challenges from particular biblical texts, many of which – on a superficial reading – appear to counter Nicene teachings about the Trinity. For instance, he discusses John 6:38, in which states Jesus that he has come down not to do his will, but his Father’s will. An initial glance might lead one to conclude that this indicates the Son possesses a will of his own, and yet Nazianzen turns this notion on its head: “The words there mean not that the Son has, but that he has not, a will of his own over against the Father’s.”¹⁷

The bishop takes a similar line of argument in a question about the Son’s knowledge relative to the Father’s. Here, as in other places in the Orations, Gregory’s pastoral bent shows, because this is a quandary about which any intelligent layperson or catechumen might wonder: How can Jesus claim not to know the time of the eschaton, if he is one with the Father? Here he says explicitly what he implied in the previous example. He urges the listener to “separate the real from the apparent meaning of the

¹⁵ Nazianzus, 72.

¹⁶ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 85.

¹⁷ Nazianzus, 103.

passage,” which is teaching that Jesus “does know as God, but that, as man, he does not.”¹⁸ While Gregory’s concern may be pastoral, his answer perhaps leaves something to be desired in terms of comprehension for the typical Christian worshipper of his day – or ours. He does not, for instance, address the question which would naturally flow from this answer: how can Jesus know something as God that he does not know as a human?

Finally, the Theologian reiterates in Oration 30 that whatever the Father is, the Son is also:

I take the view that he is called ‘Son’ because he is not simply identical in substance with the Father, but stems from him. He is ‘Only-begotten’ not just because he alone stems uniquely from what is unique, but because he does so in a unique fashion unlike things corporeal.¹⁹

One possibility for what Gregory means here was hinted at previously in Oration 29, when he notes that we are fathers and sons in a different sense because we “stem from” two, rather than a single being. Thus the Word is uniquely a Son because he is begotten from one person alone.²⁰ Later in that same section of Oration 30, Gregory states their relationship simply and beautifully. “The Son, he says, “is the concise and simple revelation of the Father’s nature – everything born is a tacit definition of its parent.”²¹ Whatever the Father is, the Son is also. Whoever the Son has been revealed to the church to be, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, must therefore reflect his Father.

¹⁸ Nazianzus, 106.

¹⁹ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 109.

²⁰ Nazianzus, 72.

²¹ Nazianzus, 109.

Implicit in any discussion of the relationship between the Son and the Father are considerations about the nature of Christ as only-Begotten. Nazianzen argues that the Son can be eternally begotten without change because “a body is not involved.” If physical begetting requires some degree of change, he notes, “an incorporeal one must be free of it.” After all, he notes, the Second Person of the Trinity cannot have experienced change, because then he would not be eternal, but a creature, and “what is created is not God.”²² In a similar vein, Gregory answers a rhetorical question about whether the Father and Son can be the same substance, since the former is ingenerate and the latter is generate. This, the argument went, must imply a difference. The Theologian replies that this question confuses ingenerate and generate with uncreated and created; were it the latter, then certainly the two persons could not be the same substance. But if one is discussing begetter and begotten “these must be the same,” for offspring and parents must share a nature.²³ For Nazianzen’s Christology, it is imperative that the apple not fall far from the tree. Indeed, for the Theologian, the apple and the tree (in this analogy) must share precisely the same nature.

A related question Nazianzus addresses is whether the unbegottenness of the Father necessitates that the Son also be unbegotten. Does common substance demand common generation? Gregory replies no, because ingeneracy is not God’s substance. “Must you be your father’s father,” he asks, “if you are to avoid missing anything he has?” In other words, Father and Son do not both need to be uncreated Fathers to be of the same substance, just as I do not need to be my father’s father to share in what he

²² Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 72.

²³ Nazianzus, 78.

possesses. In one of several instances of this rhetorical strategy in these particular Orations, Nazianzen exposes an argument by *reductio ad absurdum*.²⁴

Later, in Oration 30, he will return to a similar idea: that a distinction in generation does not undermine the commonality of nature. Drawing on Colossians 1:15, he argues that Jesus is called the “Image” of God “because he is consubstantial with the Father,” in the way that an image naturally flows from an original, and not the original from the copy. But, he adds, St. Paul’s language goes further. Unlike standard images – a painting, or a mosaic – the Son is “a living image of a living being,” an exact replica because unlike complex beings, simple beings (which cannot be broken down into constituent parts, like the Godhead) have no points of likeness or unlikeness from which they can deviate from one another. Thus, the Son and the Father are “exact replicas” of one another.²⁵ Unlike modern facsimile machines, nothing is lost from the original to the copy in this case.

From the Theologian’s insights on the Son’s begottenness, questions about authority and equality in the Triune relations naturally follow. If the Son is generate and the Father is ingenerate, are they still equal in being, glory, and power? Gregory offers a nuanced response to these questions throughout these two Orations. In 29, he excoriates his opponents who feign belief in the equality of the Father and the Son but subtly undermine it in the language they utilize. Nazianzen warns against any description of God that one would apply to the Father but not the Son, which would thereby “make him

²⁴ Nazianzus, 80.

²⁵ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 110.

subordinate” and would “truncate his Godhead.”²⁶ Similarly, in Oration 30, he examines the issue of Christ’s obedience in relation to the equality in nature of the Godhead. On Gregory’s reading, the obedience rendered by the Son does not imply a secondary status, because this submission is mutual, and is willed both by the Father and the Son. “In my view Christ’s submission is the fulfilment of the Father’s will,” he says. This is because “the Son actively produces submission to the Father, while the Father wills and approves submission to the Son.”²⁷ The bishop, however, is not explicit in how the Father submits to the Son.

In Oration 29, Nazianzen answers whether the Father as the “cause” of the Begotten implies a superiority in nature. In response, Gregory says the error here is arguing “from the particular to the general.” The Son’s generation from the ingenerate Father does not necessitate a subordinate status for the Son.²⁸ Later in the same Oration, Gregory will simply state, “For us he is true God, and on the same level as the Father.”²⁹ He seeks precision of language here to avoid any slippage or room for misunderstanding or misappropriation of his teaching. He wants his hearers to be clear that the First and Second Person of the Trinity are both God, fully and equally.

Nazianzus continues to sharpen this theme in Oration 30, as he deals explicitly with passages of Scripture which could be used to challenge his conclusion. For instance, he discusses Proverbs 8:12, which may have been allegorically read as referencing Christ.

²⁶ Nazianzus, 82.

²⁷ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 96.

²⁸ Nazianzus, 83.

²⁹ Nazianzus, 86.

Read this way, one needs is to address why it states that the Son was both created and begotten. The Theologian responds with a simple but elegant rule for reading Scripture in reference to the person of Christ: “Whatever we come across with a causal implication we will attribute to the humanity; what is absolute and free of cause we will reckon to the Godhead.”³⁰ Later in the same Oration, he offers another strategy for dealing with texts that seem to imply the Son’s subordination. “Is it not clear,” he asks, referencing the existence of pericopes that imply both the Father’s superiority and the Son’s equality, “that the superiority belongs to the cause and the equality to the nature?”³¹ Of course, up to Nazianzen’s time and far beyond it, it has not always been clear. This is why the church continues to recite creeds and read the writings of the Fathers. This is also why he returns repeatedly to this question, even in the course of a mere two addresses. Again in Oration 30 he will read a passage about the Son’s obedience to the Father as describing their “equal authority over their creation.”³²

Incarnation and Soteriology

Throughout these Orations, Gregory also treats the question of the incarnation and how the Son’s corporeality relates to soteriology. In Oration 29, he scorns his rhetorical opponents who compromise the Son’s divinity because “he took on your thick corporeality.” In language that is obviously pre-Chalcedonian, he goes on to describe how “man and God blended” in order that “I might be made God to the same extent that

³⁰ Nazianzus, 94.

³¹ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 98.

³² Nazianzus, 102.

he was made man.”³³ Nazianzus returns to the topic of theosis in Oration 30, arguing that the theandric union results in the possibility of humans “being made God as a result of this intermingling.”³⁴ A few paragraphs later, drawing on the kenotic Christ-hymn of Philippians 2, he says Jesus “bears the whole of me,” destroying the lower element in us so that we “may share in what is his through this intermingling.”³⁵ Again, one wonders if the language of “intermingling” would be prudent after Chalcedon. Regardless, the Theologian reiterates the divine-human union in Christ repeatedly in order to narrate the mechanism by which sanctification becomes possible. Thus, at least in this respect, Christology and soteriology are inextricably linked (perhaps even intermingled).

In discussing the corporeality of the Son, Gregory is naturally pressured to address the question of suffering (which is another way he combats the accusation of change or passibility in the Second Person of the Godhead). Because, according to Oration 30, “he still has with him the body he assumed,” Nazianzus needs to address certain natural questions that arise about Christ. As with the queries addressed above regarding the Son’s knowledge, he will answer questions about Christ’s suffering by returning to the divine/human union. Thus Gregory will speak of “what [Jesus] suffered as a man,” implying that this suffering did not apply to him as the eternal Word.³⁶ He will make this explicit later in Oration 30, addressing the language of suffering that is used in

³³ Nazianzus, 86.

³⁴ Nazianzus, 95.

³⁵ Nazianzus, 97.

³⁶ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 105.

the passion narratives, but concluding it is “clear to everybody” that such language addresses “the passible element [and] not the immutable nature transcending suffering.”³⁷

Related to Christ’s suffering is the question of sin. Reflecting the witness of Scripture and the early consensus of the (still-forming) tradition, Gregory affirms that the Son was fully human in every way as we are, with one exception:

He has united with himself all that lay under condemnation, in order to release it from condemnation. For all our sakes he became all that we are, sin apart – body soul, mind, all that death pervades. The joint result is a man who is visibly, because he is spiritually discerned as, God.³⁸

A “man” who is “God.” As he does throughout, the Theologian relishes in the great mysteries at the heart of Christian teaching. He revels in the conviction that the Second Person of the Trinity has “bodily experiences” as we do: “sin aside,” human experiences “are ours and his.”³⁹ Again we see that it is the Son’s condescension to us that makes our theosis, our salvific transformation, possible. Thus Nazianzen concludes Oration 30 with a reiteration of the intimate connection between the person and work of Christ, emphasizing again that we “may ascend from below to become God, because he came down from above for us.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Nazianzus, 107. Gregory is either being cheeky with his audience here, or he presumes a great deal about the theological acumen of the ordinary reader of Scripture.

³⁸ Nazianzus, 111.

³⁹ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 105.

⁴⁰ Nazianzus, 112.

Faith and Reason

Given that St. Gregory is wading in the deep waters of still-forming dogma, it is not surprising that epistemology plays a crucial, if second-order, role in his reflections. Throughout Orations 29 and 30, reason therefore serves as an important but not primary factor. For instance, Nazianzus is bold in naming the limits of unaided reason in comprehending the Godhead. In places, he warns against attempting to understand too much, anticipating the apophatic tradition that will characterize much of later Eastern Christianity. Elsewhere, he embraces and even celebrates the central mysteries of the faith which run counter to human expectation. Finally, he narrates the proper use of reason and describes how it can serve the truth of Christian revelation.

Perhaps what is most fascinating about Nazianzen is that, although he is a writer so doctrinally sound that the church has given him the moniker “the Theologian,” he is not afraid to describe the boundaries of reason’s usefulness and warn against what cannot be known by mortal minds. For instance, in Oration 29, referring to the Father’s begetting, he tells his hearers it “would be a triviality if it could be understood by you,” who do not even have full knowledge of their own creation.⁴¹ The reader can then almost sense Gregory’s frustration growing as he asks, rhetorically, “How has [the Son] been begotten?” Immediately, he answers his listeners,

...I re-utter the question with loathing. God’s begetting ought to have the tribute of our reverent silence. The important point is for you to learn that he has been begotten. As to the way it happens, we shall not concede that even angels, much less you, know that. Shall I tell you the way? In a way known only to the begetting Father and the begotten Son.⁴²

⁴¹ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 75.

⁴² Nazianzus, 76.

Even angels cannot know the “how” of begetting; for the bishop, the Christian’s vocation is to celebrate the wonder of God’s gift in and through the Son, who is a distinct Person but not a different being. Gregory will strike a similar chord, returning to even deeper doctrinal bedrock, in Oration 30. Drawing on the Divine Name utilized with “reverent silence” by the Hebrews, Nazianzus reminds his readers, “our starting-point must be the fact that God cannot be named.”⁴³

Indeed, for the Theologian, reason is powerless to get all the way to the bottom of the sacred mysteries. If, he warns, one jettisons faith and plumbs these depths with the power of reason alone, “then reason gives way in the face of the vastness of the realities.” This could, then, to an outsider appear to present “a frailty in our creed,” when instead the weakness belongs to reason itself, which is unable to comprehend the One who created it.⁴⁴ He strikes a similar note when addressing a hypothetical argument earlier in Oration 29 related to the Son’s existence when he was begotten. He calls such mental gymnastics sandcastles “that cannot stand a puff of wind.” These conundrums present no stumbling block, Gregory insists, because they offer an “absurdity” rather than a real challenge which would demand an answer.⁴⁵ Ultimately, however, one’s reasoning faculties and one’s creedal commitments are not in competition. “Faith, in fact,” Nazianzen will conclude, “is what gives fullness to our reasoning.”⁴⁶

⁴³ Nazianzus, 107.

⁴⁴ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 88-89.

⁴⁵ Nazianzus, 77.

⁴⁶ Nazianzus, 89. On the same page, Gregory will tell his audience they should, above all, pray that their opponents would be turned by God to the truth, and thus become “believers instead of logicians.”

Given reason's finitude in comprehending the Godhead and the precise mechanism of the Father's begetting, it naturally follows that greater understanding will only be possible in the eschaton. This is not itself certain, however. Gregory scoffs at a question about the Father's being and responds that it is "a high thing that we may perhaps learn what it is in the time to come."⁴⁷ He remains pugnacious at the conclusion of Oration 29, nonetheless holding out hope that his opponents, though "bent on quarrel," might be saved by the Trinity whose operations they are at best questioning and at worst denying. It is this God, who is Trinity, in whom one can rest "until the more complete revelation of what we long for in Christ himself" is manifest.⁴⁸ Nazianzus returns to this theme in Oration 30, referring to Christ as mediator, who "at this moment" is interceding on his behalf, "until he makes me divine by the power of his incarnate manhood."⁴⁹ For the Theologian, the loftiest insights into the person of the Begotten will always, this side of the eschaton, remain dim and imperfect until, as St. Paul says, "the complete comes" and the saints can, at last, see clearly.⁵⁰

Rhetorical Style

Before concluding this exploration of the Orations, it is worth reflecting on Nazianzen's rhetorical style in reference to both his general audience and his particular opponents. To put it simply, Gregory has a frankness in these Orations that is stunning

⁴⁷ Nazianzus, 79.

⁴⁸ Nazianzus, 89.

⁴⁹ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 105.

⁵⁰ 1 Corinthians 13:10 (NRSV)

even to the modern reader. Thus, while he accuses his opponents of sinking to “outrageously provocative” arguments, he is not above provocation either,⁵¹ even if he blames them for forcing him to “do rash things” from time to time.⁵² Bold perhaps to a fault, Nazianzen will call his interlocutors “empty-headed theologian[s]” for their insistence on uttering what he deems “blasphemies.”⁵³ Even the questions of this faction will irk him: “You must be mad to ask the question,” he states following (yet another) inquiry about begottenness, before implying that they possess “earthbound and materialistic” patterns of thought.⁵⁴

Again, in Oration 29, he refers to the endless questions about the Father’s begetting as “crude, bodily ideas, from crude, bodily people.”⁵⁵ Low though they may be, they are nonetheless cunning enough to try and trap him with their questions,⁵⁶ and, Gregory accuses, they are not above “fight[ing] foul.”⁵⁷ Still, their arguments amount to little more than “ignorance,” which is the best that their “carnal” natures can offer in their feeble attempts to usurp the truth.⁵⁸ While Gregory is more aggressive in Oration 29, he

⁵¹ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 73.

⁵² Nazianzus, 74.

⁵³ Nazianzus, 78.

⁵⁴ Nazianzus, 79.

⁵⁵ Nazianzus, *Theological Orations*, 80.

⁵⁶ Nazianzus, 83.

⁵⁷ Nazianzus, 84.

⁵⁸ Nazianzus, 85-86.

does not drop his disdain in Oration 30, at one point calling his questioners “textual vandals”⁵⁹ and later mocking “their grand, irresistible arguments.”⁶⁰

Such language is striking to 21st century ears but it quite effectively illustrates both the distance between ancient and contemporary rhetoric, and how crucial this topic is to Gregory. While one could reasonably ask how persuasive such an approach might be to those who were in his opponents’ camp, the salient point here is that something significant was at stake for Nazianzen. Indeed, a similar question that animates this project seems to have inspired the Theologian: what could be more central to the faith than Christ? And, as seen above, the questions that this party was raising undermined crucial elements of Christology, even threatening the equal dignity of the Son in relation to the Father and thus undermining not only soteriology but the whole of the emerging consensus about the Godhead.

Conclusion

This essay has explored the person of Christ in two of Nazianzen’s most Christologically-oriented Orations. Noted already is how everything, from his preliminary discussions of language and time, to related questions of eschatology and soteriology, are but tributaries to the river of his grand concern: the equal dignity, nature, power, and glory of Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word and Son of God, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is rightly to be praised. Gregory’s Orations thus inform both the content and the purpose of orthodoxy: not merely right doctrine, but right doctrine preserved to make true worship possible. Though Nazianzus peppers his arguments with

⁵⁹ Nazianzus, 93.

⁶⁰ Nazianzus, 95.

fascinating apophatic language and proceeds with proper epistemic humility, he is not afraid to engage his opponents directly and sometimes aggressively, because he knows core aspects of the gospel are at issue in the deliberations of the church of his time.

This is not any less true today, and thus Gregory's insights into the person of Christ in Orations 29 and 30 still serve the church as she corrects error and teaches her children right praise of the only-Begotten Word of the Father made incarnate for our salvation. For this project, Nazianzen's Orations offer both a historical example of the pastoral office utilized effectively to teach Christology, as well as an evergreen witness to the ongoing work of reiterating the truth to God's people, which is always in danger of being watered down in pursuit of cultural acceptance and intellectual fads. St. Gregory carried out his dogmatic work with a shepherd's care for the people he served, a helpful model for a project which seeks to empower God's people with the beautiful, life-altering of truth of God's Son, so that orthodoxy might be met with doxology.

This examination now turns from Nazianzen to a contemporary preacher, theologian, and leader. Pope Benedict XVI presided over the Roman Catholic Church as Pontiff after being a professor, theologian, and doctrinal guardian for decades. Like Gregory, the preacher first known as Joseph Ratzinger possesses both a first-rate mind and a heart for the church. Though the scope of Benedict's ministry is larger than Nazianzen, he offers a contemporary example of a church leader attempting to care pastorally for his flock by attending to matters of doctrine in a contentious season. As we will see, Christology is for Ratzinger every bit as crucial and contested a matter in the 21st century church as it was in the early church.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Before ascending the Chair of Peter, Joseph Ratzinger was widely heralded as one of the greatest Catholic theologians of the 20th century. Upon his election as Bishop of Rome, Pope Benedict XVI was thrust onto the world stage, whose spotlight was not always charitable. Nevertheless, in addition to his pastoral and administrative duties, he continued to write, even completing a magisterial three-volume work on Jesus during his pontificate.

Ratzinger is a fascinating figure, both intellectually and personally. Regarded as progressive going into Vatican II, he was later derided by some quarters as an arch-conservative “attack dog” of the Pope. But beneath such controversies there has always been a humble German professor who, for years, only desired to retire and write books. Never a stranger to controversy, Benedict at long last discovered that as Pope, no one could prevent him from becoming Pope Emeritus. Now in his twilight, he leaves behind decades of rich theological work.

According to Holger Zaborowski, one can discern several emphases throughout Ratzinger’s wide-ranging corpus: these include the doctrine of God, Christology,

ecclesiology, and liturgy.¹ This essay will focus on Ratzinger's Christology, a theme so central for him that it connects to many other areas of his doctrinal reflections. The current examination begins with Ratzinger's views on the resurrection as the central datum for Christology, then on to considerations about Christ's divinity, which naturally lead to questions about the historical Jesus. Then, it will look at his insistence on connecting Christ's office to his personhood, before concluding with a look at how the Holy Father's ecclesiology informs his Christology (and vice-versa).

Ratzinger has always been first a theologian of and for the Church.² Though renowned internationally as a systematic theologian, he also wrote books for popular audiences, as well as encyclicals (during his papacy) clarifying and expounding the dogma of the Church. For this reason, this investigation has drawn on a variety of texts from each of these areas of his work: popular writings, scholarly tomes, and ecclesial texts. It also draws, on a more limited basis, upon first-person interviews in which Ratzinger has reflected on his own work, as well as secondary resources analyzing his theology.

As a young theologian who was just beginning to garner attention, Joseph Ratzinger corresponded with a lay Catholic woman in his native Germany, a writer named Ida Friederike Gorres. In an interview, Ratzinger recalled that she took an intellectual interest in him because, unusual for a young Christian scholar in Germany, he

¹See Benedict XVI, *Credo for Today: What Christians Believe*, trans. Michael J. Miller (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2009), 203.

² In this chapter, "Church" is generally capitalized to denote Benedict's specific context in the Roman Catholic Church.

was “both modern and faithful.”³ This is an apt description for Ratzinger’s vision of Jesus. As a lifelong scholar, he has always kept abreast of academic, political, and cultural trends and contributed to multiple theological fields, including Christology. Nevertheless, he has retained a humble sense that Jesus is not merely his private pursuit but the Lord who is met in the Bible and in the liturgy of the Church. It is this approach to Christology, at once contemporary and traditioned, that makes Ratzinger’s corpus a valuable subject of inquiry.

The Resurrection

For Ratzinger, Easter as received in Scripture and celebrated in the Mass is the hinge on which Christology turns. Both the identity of Jesus and the destiny of humanity rest on the truth of the resurrection. He begins his “Theses on Christology” with a robust dictum: “The starting point for Christology in the New Testament is the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.”⁴ Though written decades ago, his fundamental convictions are unchanged. In his highly popular Jesus trilogy, written in his final active years, Benedict remained just as strident on this point:

The Christian faith stands or falls with the truth of the testimony that Christ is risen from the dead. If this were taken away, it would still be possible to piece together from the Christian tradition a series of interesting ideas about God and men, about man's being and his obligations, a kind of religious world view: the Christian faith itself would be dead.⁵

³ Benedict XVI and Peter Seewald, *Last Testament: In His Own Words*, trans. Jacob Phillips (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2017), 91.

⁴ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching* (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press, 1985), 3.

⁵ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Entrance into Jerusalem to the Resurrection* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), 241.

As many modern revisions of Jesus have illustrated, a Jesus without the resurrection leaves little to worship. In his *Principles of Catholic Theology*, Ratzinger referred to the death and resurrection of Jesus as “the center of salvation history.”⁶ Without this foundation, any Christian movement or institution can only crumble into meaninglessness.

In interrogating the biblical witness about Easter, Ratzinger carefully parses out the relationship of biblical and Greek ideas in exploring how Jesus’ resurrection informs humanity’s future. “One can only arrive at an answer if one inquires carefully into the real intentions of the biblical testimony,” he notes, “and at the same time considers new the relation between the biblical and Greek ideas.”⁷ While many 20th century scholars argued about the supposed “dualism” these issues raised, Benedict – as he so often does – rejects a hard bifurcation of these categories, arguing instead that both the Greek philosophical and the New Testament data be each understood as “half the answer to the question of the fate of man.”⁸ Rather than choose one or the other, the Prefect invites his readers to imagine them in tandem.

In mining the biblical witness, he differentiates between the earliest sources such as 1 Corinthians 15 and the proto-creeds which address the resurrection (discussed in Chapter 2), and the narrative sources from the gospels. Ratzinger refers to these, in turn, as the confessional tradition and the narrative tradition.⁹ While the confessional tradition

⁶ Quoted in Benedict XVI, *Credo*, 203.

⁷ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 241.

⁸ Benedict XVI, *Credo*, 95.

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 248.

lacks some of the details of the narrative tradition, “what is demanded above all is fidelity.”¹⁰ One such detail in the narrative stream is the presence of women. For instance, Benedict emphasizes Peter’s testimony as foundational to the confessional tradition,¹¹ but goes on to elaborate on the women at the tomb in the narrative tradition as paradigmatic for the faithful women of the church throughout history who are “constantly opening the door” and blessing the Lord and his followers with their presence.¹²

The empty tomb, for Ratzinger, is not in itself evidence of Jesus’ resurrection. It is a necessary, but not a sufficient, grounding for Easter faith.¹³ Nevertheless, the empty tomb cannot be overlooked, because “a resurrection proclamation would have been impossible if Jesus’ body had been lying in the grave.”¹⁴ The preaching of Jesus’ resurrection has implications both for the Church’s understanding of God and of her own future. In his post-Easter appearances, the Bible indicates that Jesus is at once the same and fundamentally changed. One could note, for instance, the ambiguity of his identity in the Emmaus narrative, or the way he appears behind locked doors to the disciples. “His presence is entirely physical,” Benedict notes, “yet he is not bound by physical laws, by the laws of space and time.”¹⁵

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 249.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 256.

¹² Benedict XVI, 262-263.

¹³ Benedict XVI, 254.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, 257.

¹⁵ Benedict XVI, 266.

Jesus' new-and-yet-similar state after Easter is the best clue to humanity's future.

Neither a pure Greek vision of the immortal soul nor a supposedly biblical view of the revived body does justice to the totality of the New Testament's witness:

In contrast to the dualistic conception of immortality expressed in the Greek body-soul schema, the biblical formula of immortality through awakening means to convey a collective and dialogic conception of immortality: the essential part of man, the person, remains; that which has ripened in the course of this earthly existence of corporeal spirituality and spiritualized corporeality goes on existing in a different fashion.¹⁶

For Ratzinger, it is not the isolated, immortal soul that is preserved by the Easter victory, but persons in communion with God and one another. Thus his Christology offers hints at a New Testament anthropology.

This is one of many reasons why it is significant that Scripture refers to the Church as the Body of Christ. After the resurrection and ascension, Jesus will be known in primarily through the Church, born at Pentecost and expanded every time a catechumen "puts on Christ" in baptism. "The new clothing meant here, which both veils Christians and at the same time gives them freedom of movement," writes Benedict, "is the new bodiliness of Christ, new because it is his risen body."¹⁷ The risen Christ is known in the community called Church, and the Body of Christ receives her life from the risen Lord. A living Body is only possible with a resurrected Christ.

This results in what the Pope Emeritus calls "an entirely new form of life" that "lies beyond" dying itself. This new kind of life, in turn, "opens up...a new kind of

¹⁶ Benedict XVI, *Credo*, 100.

¹⁷ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *The Nature and Mission of Theology*, trans. Adrian Walker (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1995), 53.

future” for humanity.¹⁸ This renewed existence, he argues, is not strictly the Greek soul or the Hebrew flesh, as “their encounter with each other has modified both conceptions and thus overlaid the original intentions of both approaches with a new combined view.”¹⁹ Only in this new future with a wholly refashioned ontology, a future only God can imagine and enact, can there be a real and lasting hope. Thus Ratzinger’s Christology is bound to his eschatology and theodicy. He cites the Jewish philosopher Theodor Adorno:

If there is to be real justice in the world, it must be for all and for all time, and that means justice for the dead as well. It would have to be a justice that retroactively heals all past suffering. And this would imply the resurrection of the dead.²⁰

The resurrection of Jesus thus looks not only forward but backward. Christian iconography has envisioned this for centuries, of course, in representations of the Harrowing of Hell, in which, on Holy Saturday, Jesus liberates the faithful dead of bygone generations. Thus Jesus is celebrated as both one with God and one with humanity, not only in history but in eternity.

Son of God, Son of Man

The resurrection of Jesus means that God is more interesting than anyone would have previously imagined, either Hebrew or pagan. In short, Easter means that Jesus is not only a figure of history but a person with whom humanity must reckon today:

¹⁸ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 244.

¹⁹ Benedict XVI, *Credo*, 95.

²⁰ Benedict XVI, *Credo*, 104.

"Whether Jesus merely was or whether he also is – this depends on the Resurrection."²¹

More directly, Ratzinger notes that, in the resurrection of Jesus, God vindicates "the claim to divinity on account of which he had been condemned to death."²² Thus Easter forced Jesus' followers, in the first century and in the ensuing centuries, to grapple with the identity of this radical Rabbi.

To go back to first principles: at issue here is not just the identity of Jesus, but very possibility of relating to God. Ratzinger argues as much in his classic *Introduction to Christianity*. In the foreword written for the latest edition he notes that the stakes of this matter could not be higher: If we do not meet God in the Christ, God remains aloof and unknowable, "and if God is no longer a God with us, then he is plainly an absent God and thus no God at all."²³ Only in the face of Jesus do we draw as near to God as our own flesh and blood, because he shares our flesh and blood.

Elsewhere, Benedict plays with the notion that perhaps it would have been easier if God had remained at a distance. The cross and resurrection of Jesus are, in our contemporary world, a difficult sell, and it may have been charitable for God to have been less specific in choosing a mode of revelation. He thus compares the particularity of Christ to Eastern faiths and reflects:

Today we stand baffled before this Christian 'revelation' and wonder, especially when we compare it to the religiosity of Asia, whether it would not have been much simpler to believe in the Mysterious Eternal, entrusting ourselves to it in longing thought; whether God would not have done better, so to speak, to leave us at an infinite distance; whether it would not really be easier to ascend out of the world and hear the eternally unfathomable secret in quiet contemplation than to

²¹ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 242.

²² Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 3.

²³ Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2004), 28.

give oneself up to the positivity of belief in one single figure and to set the salvation of man and of the world on the pin-point, so to speak, of this one chance moment in history.²⁴

Here the Pope Emeritus displays his special charism for evincing a knowledgeable appreciation for other faiths while refusing to compromise the classic conviction that, strangely enough, redemption has come through this one, unique, ‘pinpoint’ in history. Respect for other faiths need not devolve into a simplistic pluralism that flattens all forms of piety and renders the singular Christ just one of many paths to the Divine.

This is because, for Ratzinger, there is no adequate knowledge of God without reference to Christology. As he often does, he returns to John’s gospel to make this precise point:

If it is true that the term *logos* – the Word in the beginning, creative reason and love – is decisive for the Christian image of God, and if the concept of *logos* simultaneously forms the core of Christology, of faith in Christ, then the indivisibility of faith in God and faith in his incarnate Son Jesus Christ is only confirmed once more.²⁵

Thus, no theology is complete without Jesus. Elsewhere, Benedict notes that a chief way the gospel writers expressed the divinity of the savior was "in the image of Jesus sitting at the Father's right hand," but over time the preferred language became “Christ” (meaning Messiah) and “Son.”²⁶ Unless Jesus is also the Christ, unless his Jewish flesh was also divine, then he has no binding authority for human beings today. As the Fathers knew, if Jesus is not God incarnate, every Christian is an idolater. Thus the Pope Emeritus

²⁴ Quoted in Aidan Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to the Theology of Joseph Ratzinger* (London, UK: Burns & Oates, 2007).

²⁵ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 28.

²⁶ Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 4.

concludes, succinctly, “Either this Jesus was more than a man, so that he had an inherent authority that was more than the product of his own arbitrary will, or he was not.”²⁷

When Jesus is seen, by grace, to be who the Scriptures and the Church have claimed, his teaching can be grasped in fresh ways. In his first Papal Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est*, published on Christmas Day, 2005, Pope Benedict wrote movingly of how God’s love is revealed to its fullest extent in Jesus’ life and teaching:

When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form.²⁸

As previously noted, here again the Holy Father refuses what he views as an artificial division between the message of Jesus and the message about Jesus. The full measure of God’s love is encountered by apprehending not only the content of Jesus’ teaching, but also the saving activity of Jesus: how, in the triune mystery, the Son not only teaches about the prodigal who is welcomed home to the Father, but also empties himself (as in the Christ hymn of Philippians 2) and becomes the prodigal in order that the Father might welcome all His wayward children home from the far country.

²⁷ Benedict XVI, *Credo*, 194.

²⁸ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, December 25, 2005, accessed April 08, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est.html. When asked, Ratzinger intimates that this is his favorite of the three encyclicals from his Pontificate. See Benedict XVI and Seewald, *Last Testament*, 208.

The Historical Jesus is the Christ of Faith

The unity of message and messenger points, therefore, to another of Ratzinger's favorite themes. The Pope Emeritus has often commented on the work of historical-critical scholars and its results in the Church and in theological disciplines. While conversant in these fields and appreciative of historical insights, he also keeps their pitfalls in mind. "We are on a dead-end street if we think that the Easter proclamation is exclusively about a historical-critical problem of an alleged fact of long ago," he writes.²⁹ Historical method can help, but cannot fully grasp, the mystery of the incarnate Word who is crucified and risen. In *Last Testament*, which collects a series of interviews conducted in 2016, he comments about his approach while discussing his lauded trilogy of books about Jesus, noting with concern "the danger that we will just destroy [Jesus] and talk him to death with certain types of exegesis is overwhelming." Instead, Ratzinger offers,

One must enter into the disputes and do so indeed without losing oneself in the exegetical details, but go far enough to recognize that the historical method does not prohibit faith.³⁰

Thus he possesses both a wariness of and an appreciation for historical-critical methodologies, when utilized properly.

Elsewhere, as Prefect, Cardinal Ratzinger elaborated on how to study the Bible critically without being swamped by the epistemological pretensions which can plague the field. Barring this approach, he notes, the only alternatives are to "absolutize the

²⁹ Benedict XVI, *Images of Hope: Meditations on Major Feasts* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2006), 40.

³⁰ Benedict XVI and Seewald, *Last Testament*, 205.

letter” or relegate the text to inevitable drowning in a miasma of shoddy reconstructions.

Instead, he concludes,

...the evidence shows that only mooring in the Church's faith safeguards the historical weight of the text and makes possible an adherence to the letter which is not fundamentalism.³¹

Thus, only with a foot planted firmly on the solid ground of the Magisterium can one safely dip a toe into the shifting tides of historical-critical scholarship. Jesus was a historical figure, after all, but he is and was not merely a historical figure. This means faithful Christians can seek Jesus through critical inquiry, but they cannot expect that critical inquiry to grasp his full import. Ratzinger, neither dismissive nor triumphalist about the possibilities of such exploration, comments, “Jesus' Resurrection points beyond history but has left a footprint within history.”³²

As an alternative, Benedict will point back to the Vatican II document *Dei Verbum* as an example of faithful scholarly exploration of the biblical texts, as it seeks to hold together both “the lasting insights of patristic theology and the new methodological understanding of the moderns.”³³ In the introduction to the second volume of his Jesus trilogy, he further describes this as a combination of a “properly developed faith-hermeneutic” and a “historical hermeneutic,” a largely untrodden path onto which he hoped to take some initial steps with that series.³⁴

³¹ Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission*, 64.

³² Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 275.

³³ Quoted in Tracey Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith: The Theology of Pope Benedict XVI* (Oxford, UK: Oxford U.P., 2009), 58.

³⁴ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, xv.

A student of German scholarship, Ratzinger was educated in a period when figures like Bultmann and Harnack were regnant in the academy. Thus, they often appear as foils in his explorations of Christology and theological method. In his infamous Regensburg Address, Benedict states,

Harnack's goal was to bring Christianity back into harmony with modern reason, liberating it, that is to say, from seemingly philosophical and theological elements, such as faith in Christ's divinity and the triune God.³⁵

More succinctly, he wrote decades previously in *Introduction to Christianity*, that

Harnack unnecessarily pits the “preaching Jesus” against the “preached Jesus.”³⁶

Similarly, he questions the legacy of Bultmann, who dismissed the Easter proclamation by arguing that the resuscitation of a dead man would be “existentially irrelevant.”³⁷

Instead, it is Bultmann’s own exegesis that has appeared increasingly dated.

Here Ratzinger’s generosity of intellect and faithfulness to the tradition cross paths. For all his appreciation of friends and colleagues who are more enamored than he of modernist epistemologies, he is not shy about naming dead ends where he locates them. On the attempt to sever the “Jesus of history” from the “Christ of faith,” as so much 20th century scholarship sought to accomplish, the then-Cardinal remarks,

The identity of the earthly with the risen Jesus is fundamental to the faith of the community and rules out any later separation of the historical from the kerygmatic Jesus.³⁸

³⁵ Quoted in Rowland, *Ratzinger’s Faith*, 171.

³⁶ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 199.

³⁷ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 243.

³⁸ Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 4.

Neither the Church nor the Bible, he implies, anywhere grants latitude to divide Jesus, despite the whims of fashionable (or, at this point, old-fashioned) scholarship.

Looking carefully, one can detect that Ratzinger is not only concerned with preserving the faith of the Church, but also looking out for the souls for whom the Church cares. In his lauded commentary on the Apostle's Creed, *Introduction to Christianity*, he cuttingly observes,

The attempt to outflank historical Christianity and out of the historian's retorts to construct a pure Jesus by whom one should then be able to live is intrinsically absurd.³⁹

This is not merely a scholarly or doctrinal quibble but a matter of practical discipleship, then. It is one thing for aloof academics to reconstruct various christs from their own perspectives, but another to expect the faithful to be able to find life, hope, and salvation in following those newly discovered lords. Such false christs leave the faithful like Mary in the garden tomb saying, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know what they have done with him." (John 20:13) On the contrary, redemptive Christian living cannot found apart from Christ. As Ratzinger says, "Being a Christian means living from Easter, that is, from the Resurrection that is celebrated every week on Sunday."⁴⁰

Echoing the findings of Albert Schweitzer decades hence, Benedict points out that often these reconstructions look, strangely, more like their 20th century authors than a first century Jewish rabbi. "Far from recovering an icon that has become obscured over time," he notes, "they are more like photographs of their authors and the ideals they

³⁹ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 201.

⁴⁰ Ratzinger, *Images of Hope*, 9.

hold."⁴¹ At its worst, therefore, historical-critical scholarship does not serve the recovery of Jesus but the ego of the authors. For instance, the Pontiff argues that the replacement of the Jesus of the gospels with a “symbolic revolutionary figure,” as in some liberation and post-colonial theologies, serves not to uncover the hidden Jesus but to replace the real Jesus with the bandit Barabbas (who was also named Jesus).⁴² While Benedict warns against uniting the true Jesus with the Jesus of ideological fantasy, he does long to overcome the division in Christology between the person and work of Christ.

Unite the Two So Long Disjoined: the Person and Work of Christ

We have seen how Benedict, in the spirit of *Dei Verbum* and against the grain of much modern scholarship, seeks to hold together the Jesus accessible to history and the Christ celebrated in the liturgy. Another standard division against which he pushes is the doctrinal distinction between the work of Christ and the person of Christ. As early as the 1960s he argues this point:

For what faith really states is precisely that with Jesus it is not possible to distinguish office and person; with him, this differentiation simply becomes inapplicable.⁴³

In other words, the danger is that this distinction hardens into another problematic bifurcation of the Jesus known to history from the Jesus who is worshipped.

Aidan Nichols notes that, for Ratzinger, the Councils of Nicaea and Chalcedon should be read as clarifying the “identity of service and being” in Jesus, which would

⁴¹ Quoted in Rowland, *Ratzinger's Faith*, 58.

⁴² Benedict XVI, *Church, Ecumenism, and Politics: New Endeavors in Ecclesiology* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2008), 243.

⁴³ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 203.

render impossible any easy divisions between function and ontology, or work and person. Put differently, what the Prefect was hoping to accomplish was to move beyond what he viewed as an unhelpful polarity between a Christology of the Incarnation (marked by John's gospel and the Fathers), and a Christology of the Cross (narrated by Paul and the magisterial Reformers). Nichols quotes him on this subtle, yet crucial point:

Here we have a glimpse of Jesus' experience of prayer, of the nearness to God which distinguishes his relations with God and from those of all other men, yet, far from aiming at some kind of exclusiveness, was designed to include the others in its own relationship to God.⁴⁴

Thus Jesus, as both God and human, was already accomplishing redemption in his very being from the first. The atoning work of Christ is not separate from, but a natural outgrowth of, his ontology.

Benedict made a similar point in his *Introduction to Christianity*, and with a more explicit connection to his concern about severing the historic Jesus from the worshipped Christ:

For anyone who recognizes the Christ in Jesus, and only in him, and who recognizes Jesus as the Christ, anyone who grasps the total oneness of person and work as the decisive factor, has abandoned the exclusiveness of faith and its antithesis to love; he has combined both in one and made their mutual separation unthinkable. The hyphen between Jesus and Christ, the inseparability of person and work, the identity of one man with the act of sacrifice — these also signify the hyphen between love and faith.⁴⁵

As so often, Ratzinger rejects a false dichotomy and sees, in the faith of the Church, cause to hold together what others have tended to pull apart.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 125.

⁴⁵ Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity*, 208.

Also important, in addition to the Prefect's unifying vision of the person and work in Christ, is the union of God and humanity in Christ. Indeed, they are inseparably linked. "Redemption thus acquires its ultimate theological depth," says Ratzinger, as "[t]he being of man is incorporated into the being of God."⁴⁶ What Jesus accomplishes in and for humanity is not so much a separate act but, fundamentally, a natural outgrowth of the incarnation.⁴⁷ In his later work, represented by *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict will link this union to the sacramental mysteries through which we encounter the body and blood of Jesus:

The imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood.⁴⁸

What had been a metaphor for relationship has become, through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the Church's sacramental incorporation into those mysteries, actuality. The grace present in these gifts "lifts us to far greater heights" than humanity could ever hope to reach through its own mystical efforts.⁴⁹

The Church's One Foundation

Discussion of the sacraments naturally leads to one of Ratzinger's most sustained areas of interest throughout his career: ecclesiology. Long before he was Pope Benedict, he argued forcefully that Jesus could not be known apart from the ministry of the Church.

⁴⁶ Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 6.

⁴⁷ Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 6.

⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 13.

⁴⁹ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 13.

He maintains this conviction today, saying succinctly in *Last Testament*, “If we no longer know Jesus, the Church is finished.”⁵⁰ Aidan Nichols argues that Ratzinger, going back to Vatican II, has always been “a man of *Lumen Gentium*,” and that it is significant that this document in its opening line makes clear that for all her importance, it is Christ, not the Church, that is “the light of all peoples.”⁵¹

For the Prefect, the connection between Christ and the Church is not first academic but personal. Decades ago, pondering his “Theses for Christology,” he observed:

these statements of principle have a basis in real life, namely, the way that Jesus Christ entered into my life. I encountered him initially not in philosophy or theology but in the faith of the Church.⁵²

Whatever else the learned professor would come to understand, he never forgot that his faith was first nurtured not in the lecture hall but in the sanctuary.

None of this means that the Church is without blemish. Jesus taught about “wheat and tares” growing together and likened the kingdom to a sower who scattered seed on good soil and bad. Just so, disciples today should not be surprised to find faults within the Body of Christ:

It is the Church that, despite all the human foibles of the people in her, gives us Jesus Christ, and only through her can we receive him as a living, authoritative reality that summons and endows me here and now.⁵³

⁵⁰ Benedict XVI and Seewald, *Last Testament*, 205.

⁵¹ Nichols, *The Thought of Pope Benedict XVI*, 244.

⁵² Ratzinger, *Dogma and Preaching*, 7.

⁵³ Benedict XVI, *Credo*, 193.

The perfect Lord is mediated to humanity through a vessel which often falls short of her master. Elsewhere, Ratzinger recalls Jesus walking on the water, and – utilizing ancient Christian symbolism – likens the Church to that storm-tossed boat. Today, also, he writes, “the boat of the Church travels against the headwind of history” even though often it looks as if it is about to sink.⁵⁴ No doubt, these concerns take on a new poignancy given the unfolding scandals of recent years, but Benedict’s fundamental conclusions remain: one cannot bypass the Church and hope to know Christ in his fullness.

Thus, the Prefect’s ecclesiology is intimately tied to his Christology. One cannot see, or with fidelity speak of, Jesus without Spirit-empowered grace mediated through the Church. Jesus always meets us with and for others in the community of the baptized. In *Deus Caritas Est*, Benedict elaborates:

Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians.⁵⁵

We can only be “with Christ” so far as we are with the Body of Christ. Reflecting on the nature of theology as a discipline, Ratzinger put this in stark, exclusivist terms. “The Church is our contemporaneity with Christ: there is no other.”⁵⁶ The Body of Christ is not an optional add-on to discipleship, but its necessary context.

Theology is thus not a solo enterprise but always a communal activity with and for the Church. Per his own reporting, Benedict lived by this not only as Pope but also as

⁵⁴ Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, 285.

⁵⁵ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, 14.

⁵⁶ Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission*, 60.

Prefect. In *Last Testament*, he denied being the chief author of the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith's papers during his tenure:

I deliberately never wrote any of the documents of the office myself, so that my opinion does not surface; otherwise I would be attempting to disseminate and enforce my own private theology.⁵⁷

For Ratzinger, the idea that 'his' theology should be taught and enforced by the Church is a non-starter. Indeed, despite decades of prolific writing as a professor, Prefect, and Pontiff, he never established his own school or brand of theology. Discussing Karl Rahner, he notes that the famous theologian was a Thomist, while he instead "came just from the Bible and the Fathers."⁵⁸ He never wanted to teach anything but the faith of the Church which had nurtured and called him.

Indeed, for the eminent theologian and churchman, the key to a lasting impression in theology is precisely the opposite of innovation and ambition. Thus, Ratzinger not only shies away personally from a desire to possess his own unique method of theology, he argues theology as a discipline becomes a parody of itself when it reflects merely personal whims.

Theology is never simply the private idea of one theologian. If it were, it would count for little, for as a private idea it would sink rapidly into insignificance. On the contrary, the Church, as a living subject which endures amid the changes of history, is the vital milieu of the theologian; the Church preserves faith's experiences with God.⁵⁹

The Church lives by the power of the Holy Spirit, not human ingenuity and intellection. It is the Spirit working through the Church that leads us "into all truth," as Jesus promised.

⁵⁷ Benedict XVI and Seewald, *Last Testament*, 172.

⁵⁸ Benedict XVI and Seewald, 134.

⁵⁹ Ratzinger, *Nature and Mission*, 105.

After all, as Ratzinger points out, both Christ and the Church are “born by the working of the same Spirit.”⁶⁰

Conclusion

Benedict the XVI, as of this writing, has only recently slowed his theological output. As priest, professor, cardinal, and Pontiff, he spent a lifetime proclaiming that the Jesus of history of is the Christ of faith, and that the Church – for all her failures – is the community in which one can not only learn about, but find union with, the incarnate Son of God. While Ratzinger has contributed to many fields of theology and blessed not only the Roman Catholic Church but all Christians with his ministry, his insights into Christology are a lasting legacy which will benefit the faithful for years to come. Insofar as he has achieved his goal not to innovate or reconstruct Christ, but to bear faithful witness to the Bible and the Fathers, it seems safe to expect his work will be beneficially utilized by theologians, clergy, and laity for centuries to come. In his final encyclical as Pope, Benedict XVI began by noting:

Charity in truth, to which Jesus Christ bore witness by his earthly life and especially by his death and resurrection, is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity.⁶¹

Leaving behind the caricatures and controversies, a generous engagement with Ratzinger can only lead one to conclude that his has been a life dedicated to “charity in truth.” Ever modern and yet ever faithful, the Pope Emeritus goes into his golden years having borne

⁶⁰ Benedict XVI, *Credo*, 65.

⁶¹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, June 29, 2009, accessed April 07, 2019, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

truthful witness to the Jesus he not only studied and examined, but whom he served and adored.

The work of Benedict XVI, before, during, and after his pontificate, was valuable to this project chiefly as an example of and a resource for contemporary critical engagement with Christian faith carried on with and for the Church. Much of Mainline Protestantism has been fueled by theologies which accept the methods of modernity but not the intellectual disciplines and spiritual vitality of the Church. Hence, the gospel has become to many American Protestants a dead letter. Unlike many Protestant responses to this problem (in various forms of fundamentalism, or hyper-aggressive Calvinism) Ratzinger offers us a way to be open to the concerns of our age without being dominated by the intellectual vices of modernity.

Thus far, Paul, Gregory, and Benedict have provided a strong foundation on which to build the content of this project. We now look outside the church to an influential psychologist and educational theorist who will inform the means of communicating that content. Howard Gardner spent a career helping educators, psychologists, and others rethink the meaning and nature of intelligence, with the goal of ensuring that every person had the opportunity for a quality education that developed their unique capacities. This project utilized Gardner's theory in hopes of reaching a large variety of people by using as many cognitive avenues as possible in preaching, worship, and small group formation. Just as ancient Christians borrowed Greek rhetorical practices to influence people for the gospel, this project employed a recent development in the field of psychology to more effectively inculcate classic Christology in the local church. To Gardner, and his theory of multiple intelligences, we now turn.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

The theme of this project is the teaching of the historic faith in the local church, with a focus on Christology. As previous explorations of St. Paul, St. Gregory, and Pope Benedict XVI have already made clear, the teaching and preaching of Christology is crucial to the formation of God's people. The problem this project seeks to address is how a local congregation can effectively teach the Person of Christ (that is, Jesus' identity and relationship to the Godhead). More specifically, this project will explore that question within a United Methodist Church, in which – similar to many congregations in the Mainline – doctrinal concerns have been consistently marginalized.

This project is built on the hypothesis that a concerted effort involving preaching, worship, and small group studies can positively affect a congregation's apprehension of the identity of the Second Person of the Trinity reflected in the broad consensus in the creeds and confessional statements of the church. For the duration of this intervention, both the Sunday morning worship and sermons focused on Christological themes related to the Christ's personhood, and these themes were reinforced in small group sessions for adults. Information and formation are at the center of this project, thus educational psychology is a natural choice for an interdisciplinary field to undergird this work. Specifically, this intervention will utilize multiple intelligence (henceforth MI) theory,

which was founded by Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner and has been widely utilized by educators for decades.

While churches routinely teach as part of their discipleship processes, many pastors, Sunday School teachers, staff members, and small group leaders have had little to no training in educational theory or methodologies. MI theory in particular is appropriate for this project as it seeks to level the educational playing field by providing a number of inroads for prospective learners. If MI theory is correct, then churches are composed of people with a diversity of intelligences, and the church which only focuses on one or two intelligences leaves many of its congregants behind. Further, exploring this theory could help explain why the church has sometimes been so ineffective at handing on particular teachings. MI theory primarily affected how this project was designed and implemented, in particular the liturgy, sermons, and small group sessions.

MI theory originated with psychologist Howard Gardner in his massively influential book *Frames of Mind*, first published in 1983. His primary goal in articulating this theory was to help all those who lead and develop the capacities of others to do so more effectively for greater numbers of people.¹ While Gardner was not the first to propose a specific number of intelligences, what made his project especially influential was the combined weight of anthropological, biographical, physiological, and anatomical research that informs his findings.² In particular, Gardner and other teachers of MI theory wished to complicate the picture of intelligence that was dominated for decades by the

¹ Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2004), 10.

² Thomas Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart: Identifying and Developing Your Multiple Intelligences* (New York, NY: Plume, 1999), 13.

standard IQ and similar assessments (like the SAT). Such tests have little to say about future success in life³ and rely on a vision of intelligence as a “single, highly general problem-solving mechanism” that does not bear up under scrutiny.⁴ Later in his career, he defined MI theory as an “extended argument against this all-purpose view of intellect.”⁵ Gardner defines an intelligence as a “relatively autonomous”⁶ ability to “process certain kinds of information...that originates in human biology and human psychology.”⁷ Put more broadly, and boldly, “Gardner’s theory offers an expanded image of what it means to be human.”⁸

There are eight intelligences that Gardner fully endorsed, after which this essay will consider additional intelligences that have also been suggested. Those eight intelligences are linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist, each of which will be explored in turn. Insofar as traditional approaches to intelligence and education have focused on a limited number of abilities, MI theory has the potential to unlock gifts from a much broader range of persons than most educational models can address.

³ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 3

⁴ Gardner, 23.

⁵ Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2006), 69.

⁶ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 8.

⁷ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 6.

⁸ Linda Campbell, Bruce Campbell, and Dee Dickinson, *Teaching and Learning through Multiple Intelligences* (Boston, MA: Pearson Education, 2004), xxi.

Linguistic Intelligence

Gardner identifies four aspects of linguistic intelligence that have been particularly important for the development of human community and culture. First, the ability to use language to persuade others toward a desired end. Second, the role of language in remembering important information (like a list, or a recipe, or directions). Third is the use of language in teaching and sharing information, and last is the capacity of language to explicate and clarify its own usages, what Gardner calls “metalinguistic” analysis.⁹ A popular work on the use of MI in the classroom defines linguistic intelligence thus:

The capacity to use words effectively, whether orally (e.g., as a storyteller, orator, or politician)...or in writing (e.g., as a poet, playwright, editor, or journalist)...to manipulate the syntax or structure of language, the phonology of sounds of language, the semantics or meanings of language, and the pragmatic dimension or practical uses of language.¹⁰

Linguistic intelligence therefore encompasses all aspects of both written and verbal language, and a plethora of skills and abilities are implied therein.

This intelligence is largely located in the brain in the left temporal lobe, particularly the region known as Broca’s Area.¹¹ Thomas Armstrong argues that linguistic intelligence is “perhaps the most universal” of those identified in MI theory (granted, he was writing before Gardner added naturalist intelligence to his canon).¹² As with all the intelligences, they are revealed in extremes of mastery, such as savants, brain

⁹ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 78.

¹⁰ Thomas Armstrong, *Multiple Intelligences in the Classroom* (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2018), 2.

¹¹ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 13.

¹² Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 27.

damaged individuals who retain certain gifts while being unable to carry out other functions, and child prodigies who become adults of extraordinary ability in a given domain.

For linguistic intelligence, Gardner sees the poets as a paradigm of peak execution.¹³ He cites T.S. Eliot often, reproducing some of his correspondence with a young British poet, Keith Douglas, to exemplify his mastery over language and the minute details he considered when examining the work of a younger peer.¹⁴ Elsewhere, he points out that Eliot was not just an aged master but a child prodigy, who, for instance, founded a magazine – complete with multiple genres of writing – at the age of ten.¹⁵ One textbook, written by leaders and faculty from a leading MI theory school, cites figures like Martin Luther King, Jr., Bruce Springsteen, and J.K. Rowling as other well-known examples of linguistic intelligence working at high capacity.¹⁶

Musical Intelligence

Even if Armstrong is correct that linguistic intelligence is the most common of the eight, musical intelligence is the first to noticeably emerge, as a child responds to a rhythm or smiles, dances, or claps after hearing a piece of music.¹⁷ While it is observed

¹³ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 78.

¹⁴ Gardner, 73.

¹⁵ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 10.

¹⁶ Thomas R. Hoerr, Sally Boggeman, and Christine Wallach, *Celebrating Every Learner: Activities and Strategies for Creating a Multiple Intelligences Classroom* (New York, NY: Jossey-Bass, 2010), 106.

¹⁷ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 99.

early, musical abilities can still be difficult to identify later in life. One MI textbook notes, “It is a complex matter to identify students who have musical aptitude or well-developed musical intelligence.”¹⁸ Educators from the New City School describe the person with high musical intelligence as someone who:

...[e]njoys singing and playing musical instruments, remembers songs and melodies, enjoys listening to music, keeps beats, makes up her own songs, mimics beat and rhythm, notices background and environmental sounds, differentiates patterns in sounds, is sensitive to melody and tone, body moves when music is playing, has a rich understanding of musical structure, rhythm, and notes.¹⁹

Even those whose primary work is not in the domain of music nevertheless often show a high musical intelligence and interest. For instance, nuclear physicists at Los Alamos played Beethoven deep into the night when they were working on the atomic bomb.²⁰

Two considerations with musical intelligence that merit further attention are its supposed linkages to skill in math, and its connections to emotions. Regarding the latter, Gardner quotes Roger Sessions, who argues that while music cannot precisely express an emotion like fear, “its movement, in tones, accents, rhythmic designs, can be restless, sharply agitated, violent, and even suspenseful.”²¹ That said, the precise connections between music and emotion, and the exact reasons why music can have such a profound impact on emotion – like the origins of music itself²² – are still something of a mystery to researchers.

¹⁸ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 130.

¹⁹ Hoerr et al., *Celebrating Every Learner*, 172.

²⁰ Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 69.

²¹ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 106.

²² Gardner, 115.

According to a popular myth, those who are gifted at math are also gifted at music, and vice-versa. This does not bear out under the evidence, however. Gardner argues that these intelligences are localized to different parts of the brain and have different evolutionary histories. Furthermore, an interest in music does not mean intelligence or skill, but he explains the popular connection by suggesting, “I think that this linkage occurs because mathematicians are interested in patterns, and music offers itself as a gold mine of harmonic, metric and compositional patterns.”²³ In short, the commonalities of musical and mathematical intelligence do not mean they are necessarily connected, much like musical and linguistic intelligence. When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote that his fictional master detective, Sherlock Holmes, would play music when attempting to think through a particularly difficult case, it does not follow that Holmes would have made a master composer or cellist.²⁴ The famed Stravinsky once stated bluntly, hoping to quell to popular mythology, that “music and mathematics are not alike.”²⁵

Logical-Mathematical Intelligence

Like all of the intelligences, logical-mathematical deserves its own place. Here Gardner and others give a great deal of credit to the French developmental psychologist Jean Piaget. He posited that logical intelligence had its origin in children’s initial interaction with physical objects, and noted a specific pattern of development thereafter:

²³ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 74.

²⁴ Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 62.

²⁵ Quoted in Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 127.

...discovering numbers, to transitioning from using concrete objects to abstract symbols, to manipulating abstractions, and finally to considering hypothetical statements and their relationships and implications.²⁶

Piaget's work, as pioneering as it was and as significant as it remains, had two main problems, according to Gardner. First, he assumed that this specific developmental pattern applied to all areas of intelligence, that it was the "glue" keeping all cognition together. Second, the actual course of normal logical-mathematical development in most children is not so clear-cut as Piaget's stages assume.²⁷

Logical-mathematical intelligence is a diamond composed of many facets. To name a few: problem solving, math calculations, decoding patterns, and many more abilities compose this intelligence. The core competency here is "the ability to recognize and solve problems."²⁸ As has been noted already, one of Gardner's favorite tests of an intelligence is whether extremes of a faculty can be found in a given domain or cultural pursuit. This is a challenge for logical-mathematical intelligence because, unlike extremes of musical or linguistic intelligence, exceptional performance in these areas is not accessible to the average person.²⁹ Armstrong suggests this is because, at the highest levels, this form of "imageless thinking" is hard for those without the ability to grasp such abstract concepts. Thus he quotes a physicist who states that his field has arrived at a place where "is no longer possible to visualize mechanical analogies representing certain phenomena that can only be expressed in mathematical terms."³⁰

²⁶ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 32.

²⁷ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 134.

²⁸ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 32.

²⁹ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 136.

³⁰ Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 95.

Unlike some other fields, math prodigies tend to do their best work early in life, in their 20's and 30's.³¹ Children with high logical-mathematical intelligence will take special notice of patterns, easily shift from abstract to concrete concepts, be drawn to puzzles and computer games, and use an orderly system when problem-solving.³² Little is known about the evolutionary origins of this intelligence, and scientists are divided on the physical location of it within the brain, with what Gardner calls a “fragile consensus” around the left parietal lobes and related areas (though he disagrees with this himself).³³ Along with linguistic intelligence, logical-mathematical intelligence (which also encompasses scientific inquiry) is a main component of IQ tests and most standardized tests in the developed world. Privileging this intelligence is largely a Western phenomenon, for it is “not necessarily superior to other intelligences nor is it universally held in high esteem.”³⁴ Indeed, it is this dominance of particular intelligences in standard Western cognitive measures that Gardner and other MI advocates wish to challenge.

Visual-Spatial Intelligence

By contrast, one of the intelligences that has often garnered insufficient attention in Western testing instruments is visual-spatial. Spatial intelligence has its origin and operation largely in the visual field, but (perhaps surprisingly) one does not have to see to possess spatial intelligence. “One must perceive the world accurately by recognizing,

³¹ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 154.

³² Hoerr et al., *Celebrating Every Learner*, 138.

³³ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 157-158.

³⁴ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 32.

interpreting, and understanding what is seen,” and even blind children can accomplish these tasks through touch.³⁵ Thus spatial intelligence is a faculty that, while connected, is independent from visual acuity. Biologically, the most important areas of the brain are the posterior areas of the right hemisphere.³⁶

Visual-spatial is a highly task-oriented intelligence, thus one way it can be tested is by asking someone to match increasingly complex and intricate images to one another.³⁷ Evolutionarily, visual intelligence accounts for the earliest evidence of human development, in the form of drawings of animals, people, and scenes from everyday life that date to at least 10,000 B.C. Such early art, it is surmised, would later give rise to written language and mathematics. If it is the case that visual-spatial intelligence is not highly valued in Western education today, one cannot deny its significance in the history of human development.³⁸

For Gardner, high-level chess offers the best opportunity to see visual-spatial intelligence at peak performance, with its masters being able to visualize an opponent’s move dozens of steps ahead, and possessing the ability to describe a full game by simply seeing the board in their mind’s eye.³⁹ More common uses of visual intelligences are found in a host of everyday vocations upon which societies depend for their flourishing.

³⁵ Hoerr et al., *Celebrating Every Learner*, 199. Moreover, Gardner notes in a later work that “[b]lind populations provide an illustration of the distinction between the spatial intelligence and visual perception.” See Gardner, *New Horizons*, 14.

³⁶ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 181.

³⁷ Gardner, 70.

³⁸ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 94.

³⁹ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 192. The recent popular Netflix drama, *The Queen’s Gambit*, showcases this ability.

Armstrong says, “this is the intelligence of the architect and the Sherpa, the inventor and the mechanic, the engineer and the land surveyor.”⁴⁰ Another helpful example here is Da Vinci, who was not only an artist but an inventor who could visualize and design machines so complex that the technology did not yet exist to make them possible.⁴¹ There are also savants and individuals with forms of autism who nevertheless possess extreme artistic abilities, whose skills bolster the claim that visual-spatial is a distinct intelligence that deserves more attention in Western models of education and cognitive functioning.⁴²

Bodily-Kinesthetic Intelligence

Another faculty which has been given short shrift in the post-Enlightenment West is what Gardner calls bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. One legacy of modernity, often traced in particular to Rene Descartes, is the mind-body split which tends to denigrate the importance of the body – its uses, needs, and performance.⁴³ Neurologist Anthony Damasio, reflecting on Descartes’ infamous “Cogito ergo sum” (“I think, therefore I am”) states that, at face value, “the statement illustrates precisely the opposite of what I believe to be true about the origins of mind and about the relation between mind and body.”⁴⁴

MI theory offers an alternative account of this modern dualism and reclaims bodily and kinesthetic excellence as a singular intelligence. As Armstrong puts it, MI

⁴⁰ Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 45.

⁴¹ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 94.

⁴² Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 188.

⁴³ Gardner, 208.

⁴⁴ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain* (New York, NY: Putnam, 1994), 248.

“seeks to heal the rift between body and mind by regarding purposeful physical activity as an intelligence in its own right.”⁴⁵ After all, this is the faculty expressed in a variety of fields and domains as diverse as baseball players, thoracic surgeons, ballet dancers, and woodworkers. Nevertheless, “being skilled in one kinesthetic realm does not necessarily indicate talent in another.”⁴⁶ A gifted mime will not necessarily make it as an NFL running back, for instance.

Of course, among the most obvious examples of bodily-kinesthetic intelligence are professional athletes. Gardner quotes hockey great Wayne Gretzky, who argues that his skill was not so much a purely natural talent but a gift that he developed with hard work (any intelligence, after all, must be developed intentionally over a long period of time for it to reach peak performance). Gretzky stated

Nine out of ten people think what I do is instinct...It isn't. Nobody would ever say a doctor had learned [their] profession by instinct: yet in my own way I've spent almost as much time studying hockey as a med student puts in studying medicine.⁴⁷

Educators from the New City School point out that students whose bodily-kinesthetic knowledge is above average will enjoy gym class perhaps the most of all the classes, but they quickly note that, since everyone has at least some measure of this faculty, all students “will benefit from active experiences in the classroom” which can help not only with focus but with memory.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 78.

⁴⁶ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 66.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 231.

⁴⁸ Hoerr et al., *Celebrating Every Learner*, 77.

Such an education cuts against the grain of those who would “teach to the test,” assuming the test only covers a very limited range intelligences (like the classic IQ measurement). But, as Gardner pointed out in a later work on MI theory, a bias against the use of the body in education results from the Cartesian split and a “concomitant degradation of processes that seem less mental or not mental.”⁴⁹ As studies of human anatomy and physiology bear out, motor functions require constant and rapid communication from perceptual and motor systems.⁵⁰ The Cartesian split thus does not hold philosophical, biological, or pedagogical water.

Interpersonal Intelligence

Next comes what Gardner referred to as the personal intelligences, two distinct but related faculties. The first, interpersonal intelligence, has to do with one’s ability to relate to other people. The second, intrapersonal intelligence, means the opposite: knowledge of oneself. In explaining the difference, Gardner drew on the work of William James and Sigmund Freud as brilliant psychologists whose work focused in these different arenas.⁵¹ Both personal intelligences are related to the frontal lobes of the brain, which, if damaged, can greatly impact one’s sense of self and one’s ability to interact with others.⁵² Though Gardner himself did not claim this, it is possible that both of the personal intelligences relate to what Daniel Goleman has coined as Emotional

⁴⁹ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 66.

⁵⁰ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 211.

⁵¹ Gardner, 239.

⁵² Gardner, 262.

Intelligence, the quality of those who “know and manage their own feelings well, and who read and deal effectively with other people’s feelings.”⁵³ Both personal intelligences develop early in life and are influenced by nature as well as nurture.⁵⁴ Gardner, writing in the foreword to a textbook by teachers from the MI-based New City School, admits to believing that the personal intelligences are most critical in today’s “increasingly diverse and complex world.”⁵⁵

Examples of people with keen interpersonal intelligence include Shakespeare, Jane Addams, and Lyndon Johnson. On the surface, they have little in common, and yet they all possessed what Thomas Armstrong calls “an uncanny ability to understand other people.”⁵⁶ This diverse range of individuals provides clues to the wide variety of interpersonal qualities that make up this intelligence. Educators at the New City School have identified cooperation, respect, empathy, and negotiation, to name only a few.⁵⁷ Another educational text suggests that one can tell a student who has significant interpersonal intelligence when they “excel at group work, team efforts, and collaborative projects.”⁵⁸ Among the many aspects of interpersonal intelligence, the key is the ability to “notice and make distinctions” among people in such a way that one can effectively communicate, lead, and relate to others.⁵⁹ Outstanding examples might include stand-up

⁵³ Hoerr et al., *Celebrating Every Learner*, 43.

⁵⁴ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 186.

⁵⁵ Hoerr et al., *Celebrating Every Learner*, xiv.

⁵⁶ Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 109.

⁵⁷ Hoerr et al., *Celebrating Every Learner*, 10.

⁵⁸ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 154.

⁵⁹ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 239.

comics, with their insight into “reading a room,” people in marketing or sales, or Anne Sullivan, the profoundly gifted woman who taught Helen Keller to communicate in an era where such an ability was not conceivable for someone with Keller’s limitations.⁶⁰

Intrapersonal Intelligence

The other personal intelligence is what Armstrong refers to as “self smart,” the faculty of knowing and truthfully exploring one’s inner life.⁶¹ In some ways this is a singularly elusive intelligence. Gardner points out that this is the most private of the faculties he identified, and thus to study it usually requires evidence that involves another intelligence, like linguistic (from a speech, conversation, or journal) or musical (gaining insight from a song one plays or writes, for instance).⁶² Some indicators of this intelligence could include the identification and pursuit of meaningful goals, the ability to work independently, and an awareness of one’s own range of emotions.⁶³ The key here is what Gardner refers to as “access to one’s own feeling life,” a self-awareness about one’s own motivations, fears, and joys.⁶⁴

The intelligences explored thus far comprise the seven intelligences that Gardner named in the first iteration of MI theory. Writing decades later, he confessed that he resisted any conversation about other intelligences for the first decade after writing

⁶⁰ Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: The Theory in Practice* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1993), 22.

⁶¹ Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 131.

⁶² Gardner, *New Horizons*, 17.

⁶³ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 188.

⁶⁴ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 239.

Frames of Mind.⁶⁵ He rejected some that many suggested, such as humor intelligence and moral intelligence⁶⁶, and later artistic intelligence. Gardner found that art is not so much a separate intelligence, but rather that many of the intelligences “function artistically – or not artistically.”⁶⁷ Two intelligences that did garner his attention were the naturalist intelligence and the existentialist intelligence.

Naturalist Intelligence

Thomas Armstrong refers to the naturalist intelligence as “nature smart.” In keeping with Gardner’s practice of offering particularly skillful individuals as evidence of different intelligences, he describes Tempil Grandin. Grandin is a woman on the autism spectrum who nevertheless exhibits an uncanny ability to relate to and calm animals such as cattle.⁶⁸ Naturalist intelligence extends beyond animals, however. It describes those who “sort, categorize, and draw on the natural environment.”⁶⁹ Among many other gifts, Aristotle would be a strong ancient example of this intelligence. Gardner also describes a blind Dutch naturalist, Geertrui Vermif, who uses his sense of touch to encounter the world around him.⁷⁰ It is believed that this intelligence has its origins in the dawn of humanity, when making distinctions between safe and harmful

⁶⁵ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 18.

⁶⁶ Gardner, 27.

⁶⁷ Gardner, 79.

⁶⁸ Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 225.

⁶⁹ Hoerr et al., *Celebrating Every Learner*, 227.

⁷⁰ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 19.

plants, categorizing crops, and knowing how to domesticate (or hunt) animals were paramount for survival.⁷¹

A (Possible) Ninth Intelligence

The final intelligence to which Gardner lends credence is what he termed the existentialist intelligence. He has never officially added this list to the MI canon, but has endorsed exploring it as a possible ninth intelligence. While many would associate the term with specific intellectual movements and figures, like the work of Satre and Camus, Gardner's meaning is broader than these associations would suggest. This is the intelligence that concerns itself with the ultimate. "What is life?" "What is the purpose of life?" "Why is there suffering?" would be some of the questions indicative of someone with existential intelligence.⁷² One reason Gardner has not added this to list of eight official intelligences is he has been unable to find its origin in the brain.⁷³ Elsewhere, he notes that he rejected the call of many observers to add a spiritual intelligence, but is open to existential because it is a more universal experience of the "intelligence of big questions." Thus, Gardner will sometimes refer to his list, tongue-in-cheek, as eight and a half intelligences."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, 221.

⁷² Armstrong, *7 Kinds of Smart*, 230.

⁷³ Campbell et al., *Teaching and Learning*, xxi.

⁷⁴ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 20-21.

Critiques of MI Theory

Gardner has, over his long career, both anticipated and responded to critiques of MI theory. He surmised decades ago that some would take exception to his use of the term intelligences, and he admitted that another term would have garnered less attention and interest.⁷⁵ Psychologist Daniel Willingham took Gardner and MI to task for what he argues is simply reframing talents as intelligences, and blames education textbooks for giving “extensive coverage of the multiple intelligences theory, with little or no criticism.”⁷⁶ Lynn Waterhouse, a child behaviorist with The College of New Jersey, surveyed neuroscience research and concluded, “the empirical evidence reviewed here does argue that the human brain is unlikely to function via Gardner’s MI.”⁷⁷ Perry Klein, a Canadian psychologist, raises a question about the fuzzy borders between the intelligences in MI theory. For instance, if linguistic and logical-mathematic intelligence are largely or partially separate, “MI theory makes it difficult to understand how people can use logic and mathematics to think about anything.”⁷⁸

For his part, Gardner early on admitted that his theory was far from settled science.⁷⁹ In his later reflections, he would even confess that MI’s status as a theory is not

⁷⁵ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 284.

⁷⁶ Daniel Willingham, "Reframing the Mind," *Education Next*, June 28, 2016, accessed June 13, 2019, <https://www.educationnext.org/reframing-the-mind/>.

⁷⁷ Lynn Waterhouse, "Multiple Intelligences, the Mozart Effect, and Emotional Intelligence: A Critical Review," *Educational Psychologist* 41, no. 4 (2006): , doi:10.1207/s15326985ep4104_1.

⁷⁸ Perry D. Klein, "Multiplying the Problems of Intelligence by Eight: A Critique of Gardner's Theory," *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne De L'éducation* 22, no. 4 (Autumn 1997): 380, doi:10.2307/1585790.

⁷⁹ Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, 11.

precisely what scientists mean by the term. Laypersons, he notes, use “theory” to denote almost any idea or set of ideas put forth, regardless of origin or plausibility. This is contrasted with the usual scientific definition as “an explicit set of conceptually linked propositions whose individual and joint validity can be assessed through systematic experimentation.” Gardner admits MI theory, despite being undergirded with significant research, lies somewhere in between the commonplace and the academic meaning of theory.⁸⁰ As late as 2013, however, Gardner was still standing by his popular – if sometimes controversial – idea, writing in *The Washington Post* to clarify an oft-repeated misconception that MI theory is similar to what is often termed “learning styles.”⁸¹

MI Theory and the Church

There are many resonances with and possibilities for MI theory in Christian formation. One scholar suggests that MI theory could be especially helpful to teachers and students in religious studies contexts “because it echoes their appreciation for the creativity and complexity of the human person.”⁸² Lisa Wolfe of Oklahoma City University writes about how she created a “human timeline” method for teaching the

⁸⁰ Gardner, *New Horizons*, 80.

⁸¹ “The implication is that some people learn through their eyes, others through their ears. This notion is incoherent. Both spatial information and reading occur with the eyes, but they make use of entirely different cognitive faculties.” Quoted in Valerie Strauss, “Howard Gardner: ‘Multiple Intelligences’ Are Not ‘Learning Styles,’” *The Washington Post*, October 16, 2013, accessed June 9, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/10/16/howard-gardner-multiple-intelligences-are-not-learning-styles/?utm_term=.604802e25ced.

⁸² Theresa O’Donovan, “Doing It Differently: Unleashing Student Creativity,” *Teaching Theology and Religion* 6, no. 3 (2003): 159, doi:10.1111/1467-9647.00168.

Bible on a particularly difficult day in the classroom, “under great duress.”⁸³ She handed students pieces of paper with different biblical stories on them and took them outside to arrange themselves by their order in Scripture. Drawing especially on bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, she believes it helped the students grasp the biblical narrative in a “visceral way” that a mere printed timeline would not accomplish.⁸⁴ Other research in youth ministry has suggested the MI theory may give an answer to the problem that, “Sunday after Sunday, sermons and teachings are given with little retention.”⁸⁵

Conclusion

To conclude, MI theory offers an expansive paradigm for understanding human intelligence in all of its complexity and diversity. Because of the theory’s built-in cross-cultural possibilities, it could be adapted to many types of congregations and ministries. For this project, which will focus on educational goals, MI theory is especially insightful. Insofar as Gardner and others are correct that traditional models of education are inadequate for the variety of intelligences in a given classroom, one can surmise that a similar oversight often occurs within the context of catechesis and other types of Christian formation. MI theory also gives some theoretical heft to why congregations often design worship services to involve the body, artistic representations, music, and

⁸³ Lisa M. Wolfe, "Human Timeline: A Spatial-Kinesthetic Exercise in Biblical History," *Teaching Theology & Religion* 12, no. 4 (October 2009): 369, doi:10.1111/j.1467-9647.2009.00555.x.

⁸⁴ Wolfe, “Human Timeline,” 366.

⁸⁵ Grant E. Carey, "The Multiple Intelligences as Holistic Spiritual Formation in Youth Ministry," Digital Commons at George Fox University, November 1, 2014, 46, accessed June 5, 2019, <https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/90/>.

other features, as such diversity of experiences will provide the greatest chance not merely to hold attention but to successfully inculcate a given topic or theme.

This project will utilize the integration model to incorporate MI theory. As suggested directly by pastors and religious educators above, MI methods seek to reach more people by incorporating the whole person into educational processes. Given that this intervention focuses on Christology, the bedrock of Christian life, faith, and identity, a holistic theory like MI will prove useful, as it has in many classrooms around the world, in inculcating foundational truths about Jesus to adults in a congregational setting.

This desire – to reach the most possible people by treating them as whole persons (one might add: made in the image of a God who created us to enjoy far more than words, math, and science) – is quite amenable to an overall vision of Christian formation. If MI theory is correct, most forms of Christian education have sadly truncated learning just as secular educational models have tended to do so. But counter-examples exist. Here one can think of the early Methodists as a movement which used multiple intelligences to make disciples. Preaching (linguistic) and singing (musical) were both important, as were group contexts like societies (interpersonal), class and band meetings (intrapersonal). Wesley's methodical sermons and other forms of teaching showed a concern for ordered reason (logic), and his encouragement of fasting recognized the importance of the body (kinesthetic) to Christian formation. MI Theory may help us rediscover a vision of discipleship that treats people as whole persons. Thus, the integration model best fits this project.

Augustine, Wesley, and other saints have described the use of worldly goods for godly purposes as 'plundering the Egyptians' (a reference to Exodus). It is in this spirit

that this project utilized the field of education and specifically MI theory. All that is true belongs to God, who in Jesus Christ is not only the way and the life, but also the truth. If the secular world has tools to offer with which to more effectively share that truth, the church is bound by the Great Commission to learn, study, and borrow them for kingdom purposes.

With a solid foundation from a revolutionary educational theory, the project was ready to move forward. Thus, this exploration will now share how the tools of MI theory, and the insights gained from Paul, Nazianzus, and Benedict came together to form a project designed to effectively teach the identity of Christ in a congregational setting. The next chapter will explain the design and execution of the project and share its results. Finally, it will offer some analysis of the results and potential avenues for further study.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

The previous chapters outlined the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary resources which undergird a project aimed at instilling classic Christology in the local church. Centered around a sermon series and small group resource, this intervention invited the congregation to delve more deeply into the central mysteries of the Christian faith. The possible effects of these measures were measured by surveys and interviews conducted before and after the series.

This project was born from the intersection of my story and my congregation's story. My own intellectual and spiritual journey was shaped by forms of Christianity which did not place Christ at their center; Jesus, in the fundamentalism of my early years, was a savior who mattered chiefly as a sacrificial victim and as the conductor on a journey away from this world to heaven. In my searching college years, being taught the newly en vogue orthodoxies of the Jesus Seminar, I learned that Jesus was a revolutionary and social prophet whose vision was distorted by the church. I did not come to appreciate the fullness of the biblical and classic Christian teachings about Jesus until seminary.

In my ministry as a pastor, I have learned that local churches often suffer from a dearth of awareness of precisely who Jesus is, and – following naturally from this – what it means to follow and worship him. My current ministry context has had pastors and staff from a large variety of theological traditions and perspectives in recent decades, and I suspected before I began this project that what had been taught about Jesus was varied and haphazard.

An exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15 formed the biblical basis for this project. Aside from being the focus of the capstone sermon and lesson, 1 Corinthians 15 served as a helpful entry point, via the proto-creed from which Paul quotes, what the earliest Christians were teaching about Jesus. Beyond this, questions of the resurrection naturally raise issues central to this project: the identity of Jesus as both human and divine, his redemptive vocation, and the trustworthiness of the Easter proclamation and its meaning today.

Two influential theologians were also explored, one an early church father and the other a contemporary theologian and pope. Gregory of Nazianzus' discourses dealt with the identity of Jesus, as Gregory was preaching to combat a specific Christological heresy of the time. His urgency and directness informed this project, as the Theologian did not assume that all those to whom he was preaching possessed a correct understanding of Jesus. Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict XVI, also informed this project. By exploring the Christology in some of his chief theological works, both before and during his pontificate, this project gained insight on how to teach classic Christianity to a modern audience, respecting the challenges of contemporary unbelief while holding steadfast to the canonical teaching of the church.

The project was further informed by a psychological and educational theory called multiple intelligences. Based on the work of Harvard psychologist Howard Gardner, multiple intelligence (MI) theory states that there are a large variety of connected but distinct intelligences beyond what standard instruments such as the IQ typically measure. Thus, besides traditionally recognized realms of intelligence like math and verbal skills, MI posits that other capacities like music, nature, interpersonal, and intrapersonal intelligence are equally valid as distinct cognitive realms. Informed by MI theory, this project sought to communicate orthodox Christology utilizing as many of these various intelligences as possible, in hopes that this approach would be more effective than traditional homiletic and pedagogical methods that rely almost exclusively on verbal and logical-spatial intelligence.

To keep the scope of the project reasonable, this intervention focused primarily on the person of Christ. Of course, it is not possible to explore the incarnation without also referencing its soteriological import. Nonetheless, the project focus was on Jesus' identity, and so the survey and interview questions focused largely on questions related to his humanity and divinity. The remainder of this final chapter describes the methodology, execution, and results of this project, and concludes with observations about its effectiveness and some possible areas for future study.

Methodology

This project collected data utilizing a qualitative approach. As the number of possible respondents was relatively small, a quantitative approach was not possible. The two methods I used to collect data were surveys and interviews, which resulted in

complimentary data sets. The surveys made a larger number of questions with limited responses feasible, while the interviews allowed for longer and more personal answers, particularly about how (or if) respondents' beliefs about Jesus had practical results in their daily lives. The interviews helped illuminate the information suggested by the surveys, and clarified that a mixed-methods approach was more fruitful than any single approach would have been.

The survey questions were identical before and after the project, and focused primarily on the identity of Jesus, with additional questions related to revelation and discipleship. Respondents were also asked a question about personal identity, in order to determine if there was a relationship between answers related to the identity of Jesus and the identity of respondents. On other words, could some responses be explained by the presence of seekers – those who are still undecided about or new to the faith – or do respondents have a view of Christianity that allows for heterodox views of Jesus? Questions about the divinity and humanity of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, or related to these topics, directly lined up with topics in the sermon series and small group resources. With this, it was hoped that a positive impact from the project would clearly show up in the post-project survey results.

Interviews were conducted by phone (due to COVID-19) and utilized the same questions before and after the intervention. The interviews consisted of four primary questions, along with some demographic queries. The four questions were divided evenly between questions about Jesus' identity and about personal practices related to Jesus' identity. Of the former, one was a broad question simply inviting the respondent, in their own words, to explain who Jesus is. The other was more specifically about the

resurrection. The practice-oriented questions were related to prayer and, more broadly, to how Jesus' identity made a difference in one's personal life. The latter aligned with a similar question on the surveys.

The data collection went well, and the surveys garnered more responses after the project than before it. I also conducted twenty-six total interviews, and so I was fortunate to have a large variety of responses to help illuminate what impact the project may have had and how it could be improved in future iterations.

Implementation

This project consisted of a concurrent sermon series and small group study for adults titled "Keep Jesus Weird." Playing off of a well-known ad campaign for businesses in Austin, TX, this title was chosen to connect with this particular congregation. As described previously, Grace is predominantly a community of highly educated and upper-middle class families, who would likely be sympathetic to the unique culture of a community like Austin. Two small groups based on the curriculum were offered to run concurrently with the sermon series. Staff were involved in implementing the project, though not in its design.

The topics and texts for the sermon series and small group study were identical over the course of five weeks. (See Appendix C below for small group resources). The project began by looking at John's prologue (1:1-5) and the pre-existence of the Son. This laid groundwork for the rest of the series by exploring the doctrine of the Trinity and naming that the Son existed with the Father prior to the incarnation. It then progressed to exploring the divinity of Jesus in Mark 2:1-7, in which Jesus not only heals but forgives

sins, inviting charges of blasphemy. The next sermon and study focused on the Lazarus narrative from John 11:17-35 in order to look more closely at the humanity of Jesus. The raising of Lazarus invited a discussion of the full humanity of Jesus, not only in his physical nature but also in his emotional and psychological makeup (given Jesus' grief over the death of his friend). The next installment of the series brought these themes together to discuss the incarnation, returning to John's prologue (John 1:14-18) to explore the significance of claiming Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. The series concluded with Paul's defense of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:1-9, 12-20 as the vindication of Christ's identity and the ground of Christian hope.

For the duration of the project, both the Sunday morning worship and sermons focused on Christological themes related to the person of Christ, and these topics were reinforced in a small group curriculum for adults. Utilizing practices informed by Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory, this project was designed in hopes of connecting with a wide variety of capacities inherent in the study's context.

The whole congregation was involved as participants, though to varying degrees. Both members and non-members were a part of the project, though members made up the majority of the small group participants. Youth were exposed to the sermons but not the small groups and were not included in the findings. The small group resource was written and designed to coincide with the sermon series, though, while every adult member of the community was invited to participate, it was not utilized by everyone possible due to the optional nature of small groups.

The project was affected by restrictions related to COVID-19. Our congregation shifted to online worship and small groups in March of 2020 and did not return to regular indoor worship until April of 2021. This affected project implementation in a few ways.

First, I likely received fewer survey responses than I would have had we been meeting in person. My original plan was to give surveys to people in person on Sunday morning and ask them to fill it out before or after worship. Second, utilizing online worship impacted many avenues I had planned to utilize multiple intelligences. For instance, being unable able to celebrate Communion took away a practice which would have engaged several intelligences at once.

Finally, by the time this project was implemented, I believe my congregation was, like many others, experiencing a degree of pandemic fatigue. While difficult to measure, I observed people in general growing less engaged with online worship and online small groups as we moved deeper and deeper into months of lockdown. One result of this is that our small groups have been much less active in this season, and so, in order to ensure that I had more than one small group to utilize the resources from this project, I led two adult small groups myself. I had originally intended for the regular group leaders to teach it, but in order to execute this portion of the project it was necessary for me to lead two five-week small groups.

The project began on October 4, 2020, and concluded on All Saints Sunday, November 1, 2020. Small groups met on Sunday mornings at 9:15 a.m. and Monday evenings at 8:00 p.m. Surveys were sent out electronically for a month before the project began and were sent out again for five weeks after the project ended. Interviews were

conducted two weeks prior to project implementation, and four weeks after project closure.

Summary of Learning

The surveys yielded thirty-two respondents before the project and thirty-six respondents after the project. The hypothesis for this project was that a church-wide intervention focused on the person of Christ that utilizes multiple intelligences could effectively teach the historic Christian faith so that adults in a congregation would be more likely to understand key aspects of Jesus' identity. The data from this project suggests some possible trends but are ultimately inconclusive due to a flaw in the collection process. There was no tracking procedure build into the data collection, thus it was impossible to know the overlap between the original respondents and the post-intervention respondents. This oversight means we cannot know if particular individuals changed their views or not based on the project. While there were more respondents after the intervention than before, not knowing who among the post-intention respondents took the original survey renders the data inconclusive. A look at some key questions will illustrate the potential findings, though the incomplete data yields incomplete results.

The central message of this project was that Jesus was not merely a human teacher. Three weeks, or one-half of the project, were dedicated in various ways to the proposition that Jesus is divine. And yet respondents were less likely to respond affirmatively to the statement, "Is Jesus God?" after the intervention than prior to it. Thus, nearly 80% of respondents prior to the intervention responded positively to the classic Christian affirmation that Jesus is God, as seen here:

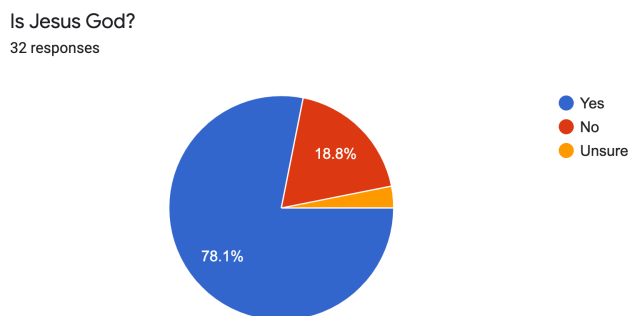


Figure 1: Pre-Intervention Survey Responses to “Is Jesus God?”

After the intervention, there was nearly a 15% change in responses, such that a full one-third of respondents now responded negatively to the question, “Is Jesus God?”

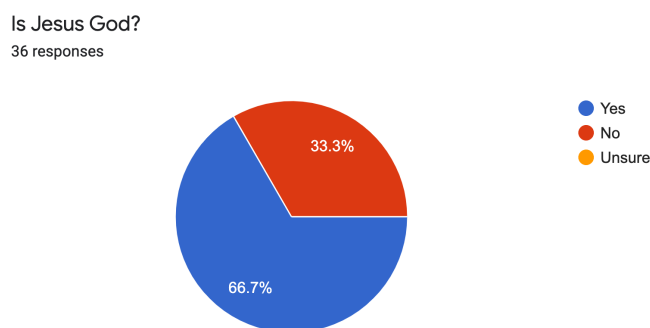


Figure 2: Post-Intervention Survey Responses to “Is Jesus God?”

Aside from the change in ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ responses, it is noteworthy that no one responded “unsure” after the intervention. This perhaps illustrates that the project hardened beliefs around the identity of Jesus, rather than softening the viewpoints of participants.

Interview questions around Jesus’ divine status suggested that there were a wide variety of beliefs in the congregation prior to this intervention. One interviewee, for instance, responded that Jesus is “like the unique representation of God in human form.” Others responded with more traditional answers such as, “Jesus is God in flesh,” and,

“Jesus is Lord.” Nine respondents in the pre-interviews described Jesus as the “Son of God,” and one other described Jesus as “God the Son.” One such response that is potentially indicative was this: “The Son of God...I guess another definition is that he is God.” It is possible that, for some, the affirmation that Jesus is God’s Son places Jesus in a different ontological category than that in which they view “God.” For instance, six out of ten interviews after the project described Jesus as the “Son of God.” One of those responses, however, was from an individual who responded as follows to a later question on whether or not one prays to Jesus: “I Pray to God...so I guess the answer to that question is no.” For this person, praying to the Son of God is somehow significantly different than praying to “God.” Yet despite the overall shift on this question that negates the hypothesis, one interviewee after the project, without being prompted, did claim that this series had changed the participant’s views on Jesus’ divine status:

I definitely believe Jesus is God's Son, Mary's son, but after the series I do feel like Jesus is God, not just a human alone . . . so I feel like he is God himself on earth, not just God's Son, and I'm still not sure of how that all works.

Another possible indicator of a confusion of beliefs about Jesus’ identity can be seen through the data around Jesus’ historical and ontological existence. While it has been a recent intellectual fashion in some circles to question even the historicity of a human figure named Jesus who sparked the movement called Christianity, this seems not to have filtered down to the congregation in ways that other scholarly theories about Jesus’ identity have. In both pre- and post-project surveys, 100% of respondents indicated that they believed Jesus was a “real, historical person.” This suggests that the project design was correct in not spending a great deal of time offering evidence for Jesus’ existence. For this context, at issue is not whether Jesus existed, but who Jesus is. One

interviewee – who self-described as a Christian – said the following after the project: “To me Jesus was a real man who probably led a life that was worth modelling and he had some wisdom that was worth sharing, but I don't consider him to be a god.”

Despite an apparent certitude that Jesus was a real, historical person, there was not unanimity on whether or not Jesus shares our humanity. We have already noted an increase in doubt over Jesus’ divine status, but, interestingly, there was also an increase in responses that Jesus is human. Just over 80% of respondents indicated they believed Jesus is human before the project, with over 12% rejecting the claim:

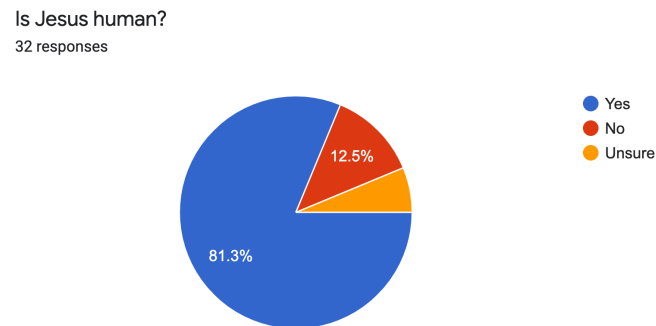


Figure 3: Pre-Intervention Survey Responses to “Is Jesus human?”

There is a dramatic shift in this response after the project, with a 10% increase in affirmation, and the only other responses shifting from mostly “No” to all “Unsure.” This is the most significant change suggested by the data:

Is Jesus human?
36 responses

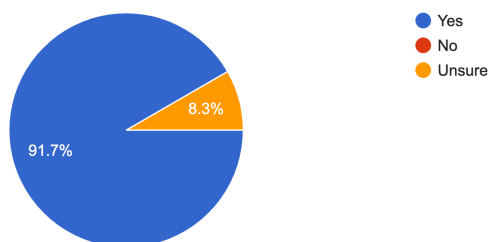


Figure 4: Post-Intervention Survey Responses to “Is Jesus human?”

Given the responses to the question of Jesus’ divinity this is somewhat surprising.

Furthermore, it would be interesting to further explore how the same people who believed that Jesus was a “real, historical person” seemingly do not believe Jesus is human. One possibility is that Jesus was viewed as an important human figure who really existed, but who now exists only spiritually or in the memory of the church, but the data does not support a clear conclusion on these seemingly paradoxical responses.

Tied to this question seems to be the question of Jesus’ sinlessness. Pre-project interviews revealed an interesting parallel: the exact percentage of respondents who affirmed the humanity of Jesus also affirmed Jesus’ sinlessness (81.3%). On the latter question, we see a similarly dramatic shift after the project as we observed in the former question. In other words, the increase in conviction that Jesus was human corresponds to a decrease in the belief that Jesus was sinless. Here again the suggested difference is stark. Note that, prior to the project, there were no responses marked “Unsure”:

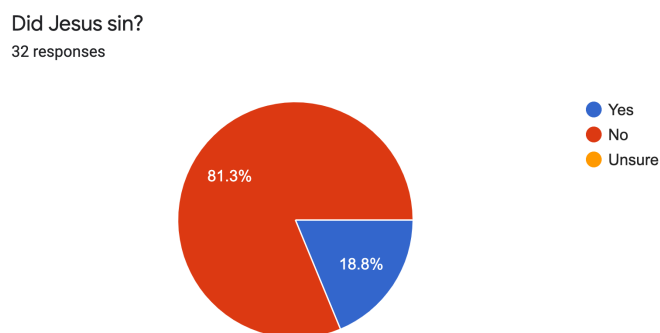


Figure 4: Pre-Intervention Survey Responses to “Did Jesus sin?”

After the project, many respondents were unsure, and roughly the same percentage believe that Jesus did sin. This is despite a portion of the project being devoted specifically to Jesus being human, that made explicit mention of Hebrews 4:15 that Jesus was “tempted in every way like we are, yet without sin.”

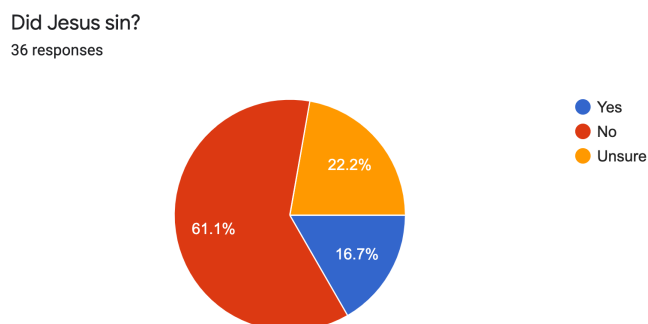


Figure 5: Post -Intervention Survey Responses to “Did Jesus sin?”

This could shed some light, however, on why this project saw a decrease in the belief in Jesus’ divine status. If people were, for some reason, more likely to view Jesus as a sinful human being after the intervention, it would make sense that they would be less likely to view him also as a fully divine, benevolent deity.

Results around the question of the resurrection also suggest mixed results from the project. After the intervention, more people were likely to respond that the

resurrection is a metaphor than before. Pre-surveys found that only 6.3% of respondents believed the resurrection was a metaphor, as opposed to 43.8% who answered “literal truth” and 50% who answered “both.” The number of respondents who believed it was only a metaphor grew significantly after the project:

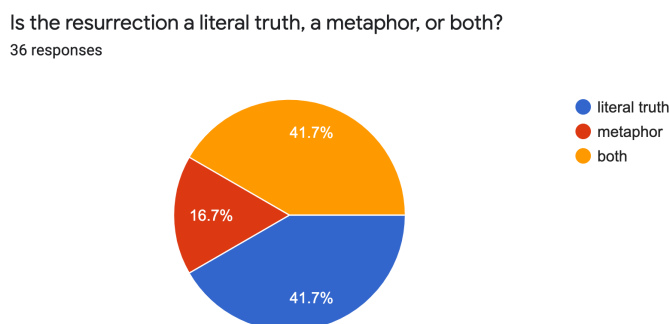


Figure 6: Post-Intervention Survey Responses to “Is the resurrection a literal truth, a metaphor, or both?”

Once again, we see a potential increase in certainty against the proposition that the resurrection is something more than merely a metaphor. This is significant, in part, because the closing sermon and small group session was dedicated to the resurrection, and specifically against the claim that it was only a metaphor. Compared to before the project, it appears that here again the project may have served to clarify the beliefs of respondents, though not in the way the project hypothesized.

Another survey question offers some illumination on this as well. Before the project, congregants surveyed were divided on the question, “Is Jesus equal to God in power and authority?” Exactly half replied yes, one quarter replied no, and one quarter indicated uncertainty. After the project, there was a slight increase in those who affirm Jesus’ equality to God, but an even larger increase in those who reject it (corresponding to a smaller percentage indicating uncertainty):

Is Jesus equal to God in power and authority?
36 responses

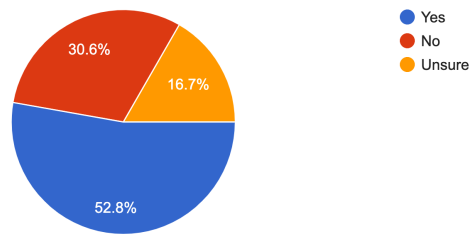


Figure 7: Post-Intervention Survey Responses to “Is Jesus equal to God in power and authority?”

While these results fit together, it still does not explain why some of these findings shifted the way they did after the project. It may seem to further indicate, as we have already seen, that this project in some instances could have hardened perspectives on Jesus, just not always in the direction the hypothesis had speculated.

Questions centered on respondents’ relationship with and posture towards Jesus also follow the suggested trends noted thus far. One question asked if Christians, “follow Jesus, worship Jesus, or both.” This is based on a common trope in some Christian circles that reifies the “Jesus of history vs. Christ of faith” motif of certain strands of historical-critical scholarship. Sometimes it is posed as distinguishing between “the religion about Jesus” and “the religion of Jesus.” The purpose of this question was to see if people identified following Jesus with a more human, perhaps Arian vision of Jesus, as compared to how they responded about worshipping Jesus. In keeping with other results, the percentage of respondents who responded that Christians “follow” Jesus went up, from 15.6% in the pre-project surveys to 22.2% after:

Do Christians follow Jesus, worship Jesus, or both?
36 responses

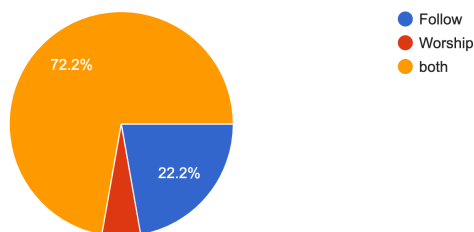


Figure 8: Post-Intervention Survey Responses to “Do Christians follow Jesus, worship Jesus, or both?”

It would have been interesting to see, in hindsight, if anyone would have responded “none of the above” given the opportunity. This is because, given that all respondents indicated that they were Christians, it is interesting what occurred when they were asked about what difference Jesus made to their day-to-day lives. When this question was asked before the project, three quarters of respondents indicated that the identity of Jesus “matter[s]” for their day-to-day life:

Does the identity of Jesus matter for your daily life?
32 responses

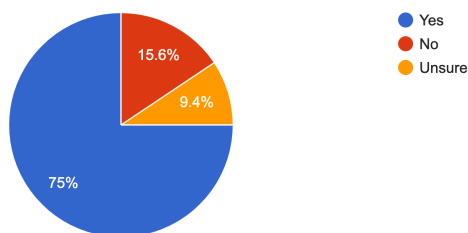


Figure 9: Pre-Intervention Survey Responses to “Does the identity of Jesus matter for your daily life?”

Note how these percentages shift after the intervention. A decrease in affirmative responses corresponds to increases both in “Unsure” and negative responses:

Does the identity of Jesus matter for your daily life?
36 responses

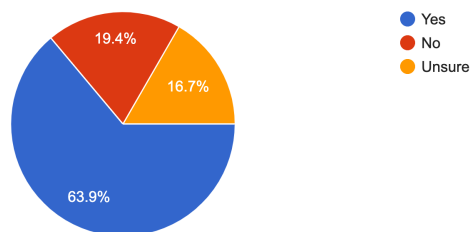


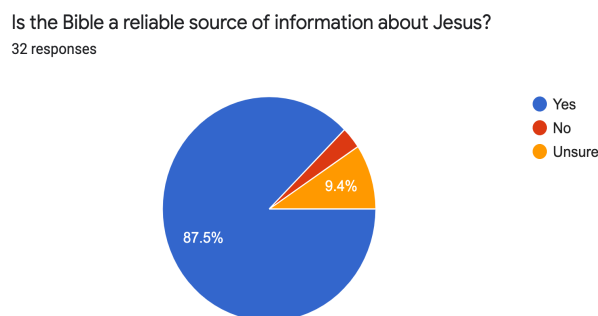
Figure 10: Post-Intervention Survey Responses to “Does the identity of Jesus matter for your daily life?”

This begs the question, why would someone identify as a Christian if the identity of Christ was insignificant? More importantly, this is perhaps the most troublesome potential finding of this intervention. Five weeks of dedicated preaching and teaching may have resulted in a congregation that was less likely to respond that the identity of Jesus mattered for their daily life. Also noteworthy is that there was close to an identical shift in those who said Jesus was not divine (Figure 8) and those who said he did not matter (Figure 11). Perhaps, against the grain of some newer Christologies, an intellectually palatable Jesus who is only a human teacher is not more compelling to moderns than the Christ of biblical revelation and classic confession.

The interviews reflected a mixture of responses similar to the surveys. In response to the question, “What difference does your belief about Jesus’ identity make for your daily life?” after the project, one person responded, “It gives me a sense of peace and joy . . . that I probably wouldn’t have without him.” Several interviewees indicated that Jesus’ identity served as a kind of model for their daily life. Statements such as this were common: “Definitely guides choices and how you act . . . not that I’m perfect at it, I just try to be a good person and be a light for how you run your day to day... [it] shapes my

outlook and my interactions and how I treat other people.” One respondent stated their response bluntly, a succinct and yet representative comment for close to a fifth of the congregation: “It does not.”

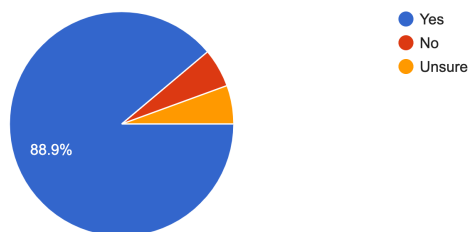
A final note on the question related to Biblical authority may suggest some possible directions for future projects related to this question. Responses potentially indicate that this congregation believes the Bible to be largely reliable for information about Jesus. While there was a slight increase in the percentage of respondents who rejected this premise, there was also a slight increase in the respondents who affirmed it. But both before and after the intervention, nearly nine out of ten congregants indicated that they believe the Bible is reliable about Jesus:



*Figure 12: Pre-Intervention Survey Responses to
“Is the Bible a reliable source of information about Jesus?”*

The post-survey results are notable, as the number of respondents increased, and yet the number of people answering yes to the question also increased, albeit slightly:

Is the Bible a reliable source of information about Jesus?
36 responses



*Figure 13: Post-Intervention Survey Responses to
“Is the Bible a reliable source of information about Jesus?”*

Comments about the Bible from the interviews also indicate a strong belief in the authority of Scripture. In the pre-interviews, one respondent commented, in relationship to the resurrection, “I think the resurrection is literal, what is written in the Bible is literal.” Another pre-survey interviewee, who was less convinced of Jesus’ divine identity, nevertheless indicated Jesus’ ministry in the gospels as an authoritative witness for Christians today: “we have multiple examples in which Jesus is dealing with the sick, the poor, authority...that constitute a model to be emulated.” As the surveys indicated, most of this congregation views Scripture as reliable, even if some disagree with the conclusions the church has reached about how to read the Bible vis-à-vis Jesus.

This suggests a possible strategy moving forward. If people are largely convinced that the Bible is reliable, and yet doubt Jesus’ identity as God incarnate, then it becomes a question of hermeneutics, rather than a question of revelation. In other words, at least in this context, it may be worthwhile to work at showing people that what the church teaches about Jesus aligns with what the Bible teaches about Jesus, rather than focusing on the reliability of the Scriptures for knowledge about Jesus.

Conclusion

While the study is inconclusive, the results of this project suggest the hypothesis was incorrect. Respondents were less likely to affirm classic Christian beliefs about Jesus after the intervention. The only major change toward an orthodox position about the identity of Jesus was in the question about Jesus' humanity, but this result is tempered by the increase in respondents who affirmed a belief that Jesus sinned. This conclusion will offer several possible interpretations about the data collected, speculate on how the project could have been improved, and suggest implications for future research.

There are many possible reasons why the hypothesis for this intervention may have failed. Here I will only outline a few that are the most plausible. First, it is possible that the nature of these topics was such that a five-week effort was not likely to have a significant impact regardless of the wisdom in its design or the quality of its content. If people have been taught in various avenues false beliefs about Jesus for years or decades, it may be overly ambitious to assume that roughly a month of different preaching and teaching could significantly change those deeply ingrained beliefs.

Second, since the responses were anonymous, there is no way to know how much overlap there was between the first and second groups who were surveyed. In other words, it may be that more orthodox people on the whole responded to the pre-intervention surveys, and less orthodox respondents on the whole filled out the post-intervention surveys. Or, perhaps, roughly the same people responded to both, but with a handful of less orthodox congregants filling out the post-project surveys. With responses in the low to mid-thirties, a swing of only a few people could make for a large percentage swing in the results. Additionally, the project would have benefitted from a question in

the post-intervention survey about engagement with the project components. Absent this, it is difficult to know how or if exposure to the sermons and/or the Bible study impacted the views of respondents.

Third, the impact of COVID-19 on the project may have been significant for several reasons. The chief impact was to create a disconnect between the medium and the message. In other words, there is a degree of dissonance in attempting to teach the centrality of the incarnation with excarnated methods. We were online for the entirety of my project, both for worship and for small groups. This had many practical implications – fewer small groups meeting to actually do the project’s small group curriculum, fewer engaged people both in small groups and in worship, and no opportunity for communion, which is not only a means of grace but a sign-act depicting much of what this project sought to teach. Online options also limited the ways in which the project could engage multiple intelligences; aside from a shorter attention span that comes naturally with online worship, not physically gathering limited options for engaging different intelligences. Attempts were made, nonetheless, to engage different intelligences with each sermon and small group study, but many of these relied on congregants engaging in an activity (such as taking a walk in nature, or journaling) after worship was over instead of in the moment, when they would be more likely to try something along with everyone else.

Lastly, this project may have underestimated the need for spiritual resources to be combined with pedagogical resources. Paul is very clear in 1 Corinthians 12:3 that no one can confess ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the power of the Holy Spirit. When Peter makes his confession to Jesus, affirming his own belief that Jesus is the promised Messiah, Jesus is

clear that “flesh and blood has not revealed this to you.” (Matthew 16:17) So there is biblical precedent that recognizing the identity of Jesus is not merely a cognitive event but a revelation. The best, most innovative pedagogy cannot replace the work of the Spirit.

These interpretations offer possibilities for how the project, in the clear vision that hindsight offers, could have been improved. First, a longer and more in-depth project may have been more effective. While opinions vary on the effectiveness of sermon series longer than four to six weeks, it is possible the importance and richness of these topics warranted a longer engagement. In particular, more attention to the atonement may have been impactful. Second, a method of data collection which maintained anonymity but still tracked respondents from both before and after the project would have likely yielded more useful information. Third, more attention to the supernatural dimension of Christological dogma may have yielded different results. For instance, teaching that only a move of God can overcome the natural doubts and confusion that come from these divine mysteries may have invited different responses. Asking people to pray for God to show them if this was true, or to pray for clarity or for an openness of heart and mind, might have affected the final results. In any case, leaning into the supernatural element in Christian confession and being honest about the Spirit’s role in revelation could only have strengthened the project.

Given the inconclusive outcome of this project, there is certainly further research that could be done in these areas. As documented in books like *Almost Christian*, it has been well known for some time that there is a serious need for catechesis in many churches, especially catechesis centered on Jesus. A recent survey even found that 30%

of evangelicals polled agreed with the statement, “Jesus was a great teacher, but he was not God.”¹ The problem this project sought to address was not unique to this congregation or its denomination. A subsequent study that collected data more carefully could be useful. Such studies would benefit from the sort of pneumatological framework mentioned above. Scripture is clear that belief in the person of Christ is a work of God, and any follow-up research should take this with utmost seriousness. The sacraments, both as instantiations of supernatural power and as practices involving multiple intelligences, would also be beneficial.

Given the uncertain outcome of this intervention, a future project could include the topics described above but build on them, expanding to topics around the work of Christ (the cross and the atonement). It is possible that more explicitly connecting who Jesus was with what Jesus accomplished would yield stronger results. A subsequent project should also be more explicit on how the Second Person of the Trinity is equal in power and authority to the Father. In particular, it should make clear how the title ‘Son of God’ denotes an equality with God the Father rather than an implicit subordinationist position. This issue came up in the interviews for this project, as noted above. Finally, a future project could benefit from a training for small group leaders on how to lead the study component, by exploring the topics and introducing the methodology of the project.

Future work aside, this project suggests that the chasm between historic Christian beliefs – the confession for which martyrs died and missionaries crossed oceans – and the

¹ “Key Findings,” The State of Theology, Ligonier, September 8, 2020, accessed December 28, 2020, <https://thestateoftheology.com/>.

American church in 2021 is severe. More than innovative teaching will be needed to address this. New resources are needed, certainly, but also leadership, at local, regional, and international levels. If church members do not know the basics of the faith, it is because their leaders have been failing them. Historically, bishops were charged in particular with guarding the faith, and I pray that God will raise up new apostles, bishops, and doctors of the church who will teach with creativity and fidelity the received treasures of the church's wisdom. But more than anything, the core of this may be a spiritual crisis. As noted in my exegesis of 1 Corinthians 15, if Jesus is not risen from the dead, we are utterly lost. And if our churches are limping along with half a gospel, if people are trying to follow a Jesus whose bones are buried in a Jerusalem hillside, then it is impossible for those communities to experience more than "the form of religion without the power." (2 Timothy 3:5)

In a provocative metaphor, Tim Keller has argued that Christians should view Western society today as a mission field. Building on the work of missiologist Lesslie Newbigin, he notes that ours is not a mission field like 2nd century Rome or 21th century China. The West is not simply pagan, it has been de-Christianized. It is not an unreached culture but a culture which has rejected the gospel. In a sense, the West has been 'inoculated' against Christianity:

Inoculation introduces a mild form of a disease into a body, thereby stimulating the growth of antibodies and rendering the person immune to getting a full-blown version of the sickness. In the same way, *post-Christian society contains unique resistance and antibodies against full-blown Christianity.*²

² Timothy Keller, "The Supremacy of Christ and the Gospel in a Postmodern World," *Desiring God*, September 30, 2006, accessed January 4, 2021, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/the-supremacy-of-christ-and-the-gospel-in-a-postmodern-world>. Emphasis added.

The results of this project may indicate that Keller's insight needs to be extended. It is possible that not only is Western society a mission field, but that many churches in the West – including the context for this project – are also a mission field naturally resistant to “full-blown Christianity.”

May God continue to raise up teachers, preachers, evangelists, and apostles, for there is much work to be done, and the mission field is our own back yard. God is faithful, though, and will not call us to a task without providing the necessary resources to fulfill His purpose. If this project has provided direction to some of those resources, even by clarifying what is insufficient to the task at hand, then perhaps it will yet point the way towards stronger, more helpful interventions to come, so that Christ may not be only known but worshipped, not merely followed as an exemplar, but beloved as Lord. With that hope in mind, “to him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” (Ephesians 3:21)

APPENDIX A

PRE- AND POST-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

- Is Jesus God? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Is the resurrection a literal truth, a metaphor, or both? (Literal, Metaphor, Both)
- Is Jesus the only, primary, or one of many ways to know God? (Only, Primary, One of Many)
- Is Jesus human? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Is Jesus divine? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Did Jesus sin? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Is Jesus equal to the Father in power or authority? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Did Jesus truly die on the cross? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Is Jesus primarily a moral teacher? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Is the Bible a reliable source of information about Jesus? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Was Jesus a real, historical person? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Is Jesus returning at some point in history in a literal, physical way? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Do Christians follow Jesus, worship Jesus, or both? (Follow, Worship, Both)
- Is Jesus alive now? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- Does the identity of Jesus matter for your daily life? (Yes, No, Unsure)
- What is your age? _____ years
- Do you identify as a Christian? (Yes, No, Unsure)
 - If yes, for how long? _____ years
- For how long have you attended a church? _____ years
- For how long have you attended Grace UMC? _____ years

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- Do you pray to Jesus? Why or why not?
- Who is Jesus?
- What does the resurrection of Jesus mean to you?
- What difference does your belief about Jesus' identity make for your daily life?
- What is your age? _____ years
- Do you identify as a Christian? (Yes, No, Unsure)
 - If yes, for how long? _____ years
- For how long have you attended a church? _____ years
- For how long have you attended Grace UMC? _____ years

APPENDIX C

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDES

Keep Jesus Weird: Week 1
Topic: The Son Before Jesus
Text: John 1:1-5

Welcome, introduction, and opening prayer (10 minutes)

Opening Prayer (together)

Gracious God, as we begin this time of discipleship, teach us to see Jesus with new eyes. Open our minds and hearts to the leading of your Holy Spirit, that we might encounter your Son afresh. Amen.

Opening Discussion (5 minutes)

Respond to this question:

What was God doing before the creation of the world?

Scripture (2 minutes)

The leader asks a volunteer to read John 1:1-5:

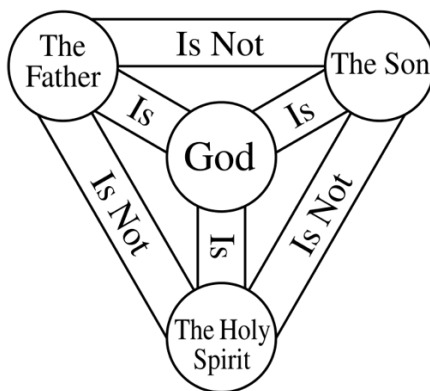
1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. **2** He was in the beginning with God. **3** All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being **4** in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. **5** The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Discussion questions (15 minutes)

Discuss the following questions:

- What is the most important word in your life?
- Why would the Son be called God's "Word?" What is the relationship between Jesus as the Word of God and the Bible as the word of God?
- When John says, "All things came into being through him," what does that mean to you? Can this be compatible with scientific accounts of creation?
- We don't usually think of the Son as the Creator – why is that?
- Look up Genesis 1:26. How might John 1 shed light on this passage?

Reflection: *The Trinity* (10 minutes)



Discuss the questions:

- According to these verses in John, which is more important: God or the Word?
- How can the Word be both “God” and “with God”?
- When does the Word begin?
- The Nicene Creed states:

*We believe in one God,
the Father almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all things visible and invisible.*

*And in one Lord Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
begotten from the Father before all ages,
God from God,
Light from Light,
true God from true God,
begotten, not made;
of the same essence as the Father.
Through him all things were made.*

Do you hear echoes of John 1 here?

Closing Question (5 minutes)

The leader asks everyone to respond to the following question:

- Why does it matter that the Word of God existed before Jesus was born? What does John want us to know by beginning his gospel this way?

Reading for Next Week & Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

O God of unchangeable power and eternal light: Look favorably on your whole Church, that wonderful and sacred mystery; by the effectual working of your providence, carry out in tranquility the plan of salvation; let the whole world see and know that things which were cast down are being raised up, and things which had grown old are being made new, and that all things are being brought to their perfection by him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

For next week

- Topic: The Humanity of Jesus
- Text: John 11:1-44

Keep Jesus Weird: Week 2

Topic: The Divine Jesus

Text: Mark 2:1-12

Welcome, introduction, and opening prayer (10 minutes)

Opening Prayer (St. Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, 3rd century, adapted)

**King of the saints, invisible Word of the Father most High,
wisdom's Prince, eternal Joy, Jesus, savior, Shepherd,
Guide your flock of spiritual Sheep. Amen.**

Opening Discussion (5 minutes)

Respond to this question:

Have you ever known someone who had an unexplained or miraculous healing?

Scripture (2 minutes)

Mark 2:1-12 (NRSV)

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. ² So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door; and he was speaking the word to them. ³ Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. ⁴ And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. ⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." ⁶ Now some of the scribes were sitting there, questioning in their hearts, ⁷ "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" ⁸ At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves; and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? ⁹ Which is easier, to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'?" ¹⁰ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— ¹¹ "I say to you, stand up, take your mat and go to your home." ¹² And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Discussion questions (15 minutes)

Discuss the following questions:

- What kind of people attract crowds like this today? Is there a time you have stood in a huge crowd of people just to see one person?
- What do you think the paralytic is hoping for from his encounter with Jesus?
- What surprises you about Jesus' reaction to the paralyzed man being brought to him?
- Look up Daniel 7:13-14. Based on this, what is the significance of Jesus using the title "Son of Man" for himself?

- Some bystanders were mad at what Jesus did and said, others were amazed and glorified God. Which group would you have been in?

Reflection: *Jesus as Divine* (10 minutes)



Discuss the questions:

- Look over Mark 1 briefly. What is the response to Jesus' other healings in this chapter?
- Why would religious leaders (like the scribes) be angry about him forgiving sin, but not his healing?
- Imagine yourself as one of the four friends taking the paralytic to see Jesus. What are you hoping for? What does Jesus look like?
- For personal reflection: imagine yourself as the person on the mat brought to Jesus. For what does Jesus offer forgiveness? What does Jesus heal? Journal, or write Jesus a letter, responding to those questions.

Closing Question (5 minutes)

Read or listen to the first verse of "*Hark! The Herald Angels Sing*" by Charles Wesley:

*Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King,
peace on earth, and mercy mild,*

God and sinners reconciled!"
Joyful, all ye nations rise,
join the triumph of the skies;
with th' angelic host proclaim,
"Christ is born in Bethlehem!"
Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new born King!"

- How are “God and sinners reconciled” in Jesus? How do we see echoes of this in the healing of the paralytic in Mark 2?

Reading for Next Week & Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

A Prayer from St. Bede, 8th century (adapted)

Loving Jesus, we pray that, as in your mercy you have given us to drink in with delight the words of your knowledge, so in your loving kindness you will also grant us one day to come to you, the fountain of all wisdom, and to stand for ever before your face. Amen.

For next week

- Topic: The Humanity of Jesus
- Text: John 11:1-44

Keep Jesus Weird: Week 3
The Humanity of Jesus
Text: John 11:1-44

Welcome, housekeeping, and opening prayer (5 minutes)

Opening Prayer (together): “An Invitation to Christ”

Come, my Light, and illumine my darkness. Come, my Life, and revive me from death. Come, my Physician, and heal my wounds. Come, Flame of divine love, and burn up the horns of my sins, kindling my heart with the flame of thy love. Come, my King, sit upon the throne of my heart and reign there. For thou alone art my King and my Lord. Amen. – *Dimitri of Rostov, Russia, 17th century, UMH #466*

Opening Discussion (10 minutes)

When you picture Jesus, what – if any – emotion is he showing? Is he laughing or smiling, is he stern and angry, or perhaps sad or disappointed? Why is this your primary image of Jesus?

Scripture (2 minutes)

The leader asks volunteers to read John 11:1-27.

Discussion questions (15 minutes)

The leader asks the following questions:

- Lazarus, along with his sisters Mary and Martha, was Jesus’ friend. Is it difficult for you to think of Jesus as having friends? Why or why not?
- Jesus does not dispute Martha’s charge in v. 21. How do you think Martha is feeling in this moment?
- How can Jesus say those who believes in him “will never die” (v. 26) when his friend Lazarus had just died?

Reflection: *The Raising of Lazarus* by Duccio (14th century) (5 minutes)



The leader asks the following questions:

- What do you think people expected when Lazarus' tomb was opened?
- What does Duccio want us to think about Jesus in this painting? Is there anything interesting about Lazarus' appearance?

Scripture (3 minutes)

Read John 11:28-44.

Discussion questions (10 minutes)

- Why is Jesus disturbed, and why does he weep over Lazarus' death, when he knew it before he arrived?
- To what is Jesus referring when he reminds Martha he had told her that, if she believed, she would "see the glory of God"? (v. 40)
- What is similar between this story and the Easter stories? What is different?
- What do you think Lazarus' first thought was when he opened his eyes?

Reflection: Charles Wesley Poem, "If Death My Friend and Me Divide" (5 minutes)

*I feel a strong immortal hope,
Which bears my mournful spirit up
Beneath its mountain-load:
Redeemed from death, and grief, and pain,
I soon shall find my friend again
Within the arms of God.*

- Think of a time a close friend of yours died. Did you blame Jesus? How did you find comfort?

Closing Question (3 minutes)

The leader asks everyone to respond to the following questions:

- If the raising of Lazarus really happened, what does it mean for our faith? Does it change how you view Jesus?

Reading for Next Week & Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

O God, the reflection of your transcendent glory once appeared unbroken in the face of Jesus Christ. Give me today a heart like his: a brave heart, a true heart, a tender heart, a heart with great room in it, a heart fixed on you; for His name's sake. Amen.

-John Baillie, *A Diary of Private Prayer*

For next week

- Topic: The Incarnation
- Text: John 1:14-18

Keep Jesus Weird: Week Four

Topic: The Incarnation

Text: John 1:14-18

Welcome, introduction, and opening prayer (10 minutes)

Opening Prayer (From the *New Zealand Prayer Book*)

**Almighty God,
you gave your only-begotten Son
to take our nature upon him,
and be born of the Virgin Mary;
grant that we, who are born again
and made your children by adoption and grace,
may daily be renewed by your Holy Spirit;
through Jesus Christ our Savior,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God for ever.**

Amen.

Opening Discussion (5 minutes)

Respond to this question:

The Message translates John 1:14 as, “The Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” What would it be like to have Jesus as a neighbor?

Scripture (2 minutes)

John 1:14-18

¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵ (John testified to him and cried out, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’”) ¹⁶ From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷ The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

Discussion questions (15 minutes)

Discuss the following questions:

- Who is the ‘John’ referenced in verse 15? (You may need to look in the preceding verses.)
- When vs. 16 says, “we all have received grace upon grace,” to whom does “all” refer?
- Vs. 18 is a claim about how God is made known to us. What are ways we come to learn about God? Where does Jesus rank among ways of knowing God?

Reflection: *Jesus as Human and Divine: The Sinai Icon* (10 minutes)



Discuss the questions:

- Look at the image on the left. What do you notice about this portrayal of Jesus? Why might this image be so famous?
- Compare the images in the center and on the right. What is different? What is similar?
- What do you think the artist was trying to convey with this image of Jesus?

Closing Question (5 minutes)

Read this selection from a 4th century Christmas sermon by John Chrysostom:

“Since this heavenly birth cannot be described, neither does His coming amongst us in these days permit of too curious scrutiny. Though I know that a Virgin this day gave birth, and I believe that God was begotten before all time, yet the manner of this generation I have learned to venerate in silence and I accept that this is not to be probed too curiously with wordy speech.

For with God we look not for the order of nature, but rest our faith in the power of Him who works.

What shall I say to you; what shall I tell you? I behold a Mother who has brought forth; I see a Child come to this light by birth. The manner of His conception I cannot comprehend.”

- What does Chrysostom mean by “curious scrutiny”? Is he dodging hard questions about Jesus?
- What are some things in which you believe, but you find difficult to explain to others or to comprehend yourself?

Closing Question:

If God is all-powerful, why did God choose to save us by becoming human in Jesus?
Why not another way?

Reading for Next Week & Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Affirmation from 1 Timothy 2:5-6, 1:15, 3:16 (UMH #889)

**There is one God
and there is one mediator, Christ Jesus,
who came as a ransom for all,
to whom we testify.
This saying is sure
and worthy of full acceptance:
That Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners,
and was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed in throughout the world,
taken up in glory.
Great indeed is the mystery of the gospel. Amen.**

For next week

- Topic: The Resurrection- Conclusion
- Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-9, 12-20

Keep Jesus Weird: Week 5
Topic: The Resurrection
Text: 1 Corinthians 15:1-9, 12-20

Welcome, introduction, and opening prayer (10 minutes)

Opening Prayer (from the Book of Common Prayer)

Almighty God, who through your only-begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. *Amen.*

Opening Discussion (5 minutes)

Respond to this question: What is something “of first importance” that you handed on to someone else? (vs. 3)

Scripture (2 minutes): 1 Corinthians 15:1-9, 12-20 (NRSV)

1 Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, 2 through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

3 For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, 4 and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. 6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

12 Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain. 15 We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified of God that he raised Christ—whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised. 17 If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have died in Christ have perished. 19 If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died.

Discussion questions (15 minutes)

Discuss the following questions:

- Gospel means “good news.” (v. 1) In your own words, what is the good news?
- Why does Paul emphasize that what he taught them was what he himself had received?
- Many scholars believe that vv. 3-7 constitute an early Christian creed, or at least the beginnings of one. Look at those verses. What does this possible creed emphasize? What is left out?

Reflection: The Old Testament and Resurrection

The Old Testament does contain references to the resurrection of the dead that early Christians picked up on. Some Jews in the first century did believe in a general resurrection at the end of time, others rejected it. One source for this in the Hebrew Scriptures is Daniel 12:2-3:

² And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.

Discuss the questions:

- N.T. Wright refers to Christianity’s hope in the resurrection as a belief in “life after life-after-death.” What do you believe is the end of our story? Are we in new/renewed bodies, or are we only physical beings?
- Paul argues that Jesus is only the “first fruits” of a larger harvest to come, that he is the beginning of something entirely new. Where do you see signs of resurrection in the world around us?
- Is Paul correct that, without the resurrection, “faith is in vain?”

Closing Question (5 minutes)

Read this selection from a 4th century Easter sermon by John Chrysostom:

Enjoy ye all the feast of faith: Receive ye all the riches of loving-kindness. let no one bewail his poverty, for the universal kingdom has been revealed. Let no one weep for his iniquities, for pardon has shown forth from the grave. Let no one fear death, for the Savior’s death has set us free. He that was held prisoner of it has annihilated it. By

descending into Hell, He made Hell captive. He embittered it when it tasted of His flesh. And Isaiah, foretelling this, did cry: Hell, said he, was embittered, when it encountered Thee in the lower regions. It was embittered, for it was abolished. It was embittered, for it was mocked. It was embittered, for it was slain. It was embittered, for it was overthrown. It was embittered, for it was fettered in chains. It took a body, and met God face to face. It took earth, and encountered Heaven.

- How does Chrysostom's understanding of the Easter victory rely on Jesus being both human and divine?
- How does the death and resurrection of Jesus reveal "the universal kingdom." (Think also about the N.T. Wright article.)

From *Christ the Lord is Risen Today* by Charles Wesley:

*Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!*

- Charles Wesley, like Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, connects Jesus' victory over the grave to our future hope. How can we be "made like" Jesus, so that we also rise to new life in the resurrection to come?

Final thoughts/questions?

Closing Prayer (2 minutes)

Orthodox Troparion for Easter (hymn):

**Christ is risen from the dead,
trampling down death by dead,
and upon those in the tombs
bestowing life!**

Amen.

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